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Sara
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IN MEXICAN WATERS



ON SAINT NICOLAS ISLAND

IN MEXICAN WATERS

BY

GEORGE HUGH BANNING

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DEDICATED TO
CAPT. G. ALLAN HANCOCK
MASTER OF THE "VELERO II"
MY HOST
WHO SOMETIMES WENT OUT OF HIS WAY
FOR MY—"DAMPHOOLISHNESS"

PREFACE

GRATEFUL acknowledgment for photographs illustrating this volume is extended by the author to George N. Warwick, G. Allan Hancock, Dr. A. C. Macleish, Joseph Carson and Capt. F. Thunnell, and to my brother, H. Banning, Jnr., also to "the boys"—especially Robert Irwin, William J. Pike, and William Toman. And further, from the heart, the author hastens to avow the coöperation and interest of "all hands" whose companionship, whose separate professions, experience, gifts and hobbies afforded bits of colour which were his to blend through this volume. Nor might he forget while he lives those more innocent offerings realized through the gracious environment of the country and the native hospitality of her people—such persons especially as Capt. James Irvine, his friends of the British Consular Service and of the old families of Bishop and Coppell in the pleasant port of Mazatlan; such too as Arthur C. Nahl and his friends in the old house of Ruffo at La Paz; such as Don Salvador Arriola Valadez and Alfredo H. Baez at the ancient village of San Blas; for, indeed, it was through such as these that much of this account was made possible. The author finally acknowledges suggestions innumerable, contributions of photographic titles and chapter heads, a persuasive stimulus and—the plain, hard work which could have been expected only from his wife, who became his shipmate later in Mexican waters.

G. H. B.

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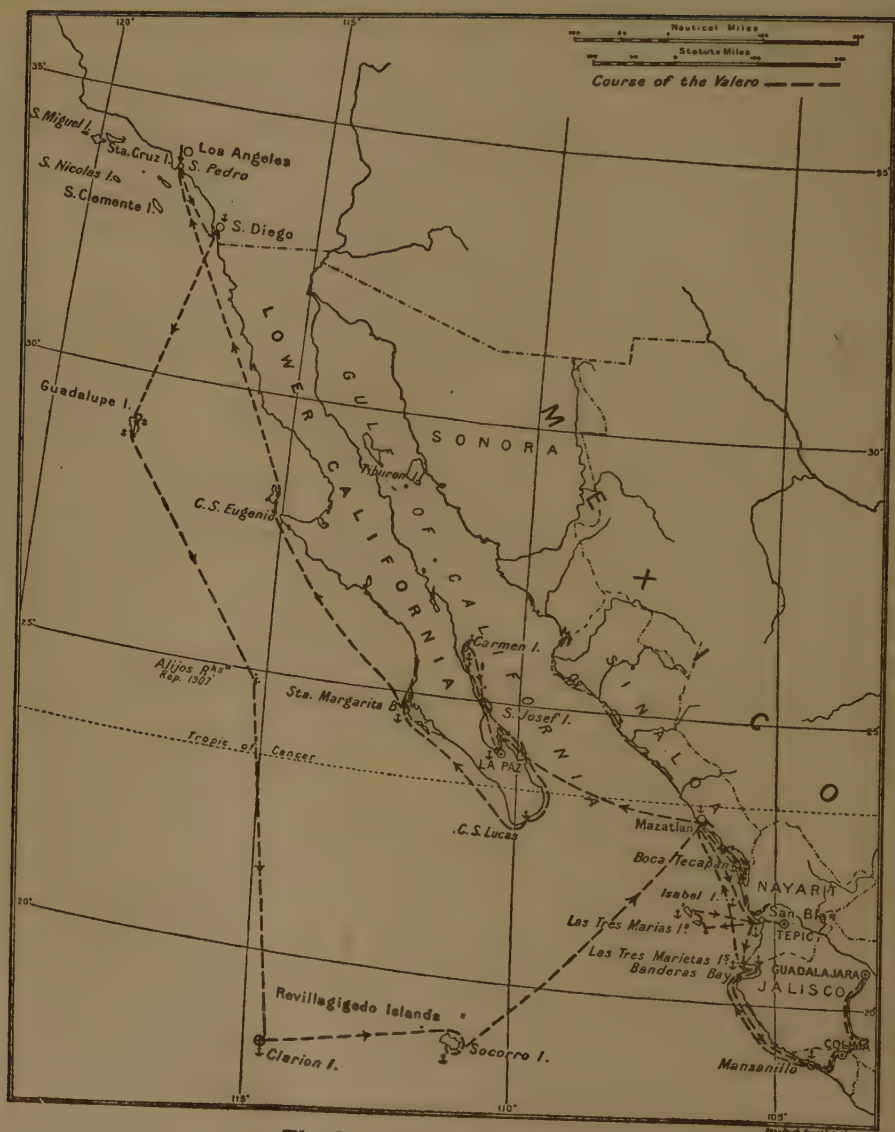
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PART ONE
REMOTE ISLANDS



The Course of the *Velero II*.

CHAPTER I

" ISLES OF NOTHING "

AN island, to hark back to the days of the impact of ruler upon knuckles and the torturing screech of chalk against blackboards, is "a small body of land surrounded by water"; and, although this definition once had the grace of riding my broncho memory, I regarded it somehow as a gross misrepresentation. I had followed Robinson Crusoe and John Silver to small bodies of land surrounded by so much more than water that classroom definitions became only secondary to the results of my secret voyagings. "Surrounded by water," indeed; but, however true that might be, it was not the whole truth. Out there, where mere school teachers would fear to tread, were mystery, romance and possibilities of untold discovery. And I, I could swim, row and sail a boat—she couldn't, my school teacher; and, if only certain ruling powers had realized the substance behind my dreams, I might have put to sea and returned with a skiff-load of Spanish doubloons and the price of "a king's ransom" upon my head.

It is quite probable that I was not alone in my dreaming; quite probable, too, that those whose dreams were similar are, even to-day, keenly susceptible to tingling moments of ecstasy when the small boat flies on the wings of a breaker to plunge her forefoot into the pebbly beach of . . . *an island!*

And one discovers strange things about islands. There are many, sometimes quite close at hand, where people seldom venture, having heard, as I had since earliest childhood, that there was "nothing there." Impossible! Of course, what is meant is that the place, wherever it may be, is simply *a small body of land surrounded by water*. One may notice, too, that those who spread this information have, in most instances, confined their exploring to observations through binoculars. They saw, perhaps, nothing but barren mountains. They surrounded them, as it were, by *water*!

Dusting off an old album just now, I discovered several snapshots taken some fifteen years ago on San Clemente, an island lying scarcely forty-five miles southward from the harbour of San Pedro, California. My venturing to this desert spot was not so much a direct disobedience of orders as a rebellion against the echoed opinion of "Nothing there." Being then a boy of about fourteen years of age, and knowing that several ships had been lost in the vicinity, that it was sometimes employed by smugglers and small-craft pirates, I wondered if, perhaps, there were not something there after all; and I confess now, though I should not have done so then, that the hope of something as bright and glittering as "pieces of eight" lay buried deep with my long-suppressed desires to explore an island.

Planning secretly with a companion, and being fortunate in the possession of some slight means of conveyance, we put out, as it seemed, upon a most daring enterprise. There were none to protest. No one knew; and the mere knowledge of our disobedience added the spice of adventure, though we feared



SAND. SAN CLEMENTE ISLAND

disillusion in other respects. I remember that my heart throbbed a wild accompaniment to the pulsing of our motor; and I feel certain that if the latter had missed a beat, the other would have stopped completely. I remember the sweet sting of spray against my cheeks as short waves crushed out from our bows, and I remember the feeling of absolute triumph when San Clemente loomed out from the haze.

A small body of land. . . . Small? It was twenty-five miles over all! Surrounded by water. . . . Yes, but what of the depth of it, the waste of it, and the mystery? And when at last we nuzzled in between the kelp beds and heard the muffled *plump* of the anchor, our delight could express itself only by a prolonged silence that mingled through the night with our dreams. Daybreak found us searching for . . . we refused to say what. And, moreover, we failed to find it. But look for any one thing, and you're bound to find something else.

I remember scuffling over sand-dunes ribbed and shingled by the wind; and I remember a quizzical frown and a look of wonder that came into my companion's eyes and set me staring down upon a weird scene of crumbling dilapidation, impossible on the face of it. It couldn't be, unless . . .

But we sprang on—stumbled down over one bank of disintegrated abalone shells, slid down another till, at last, we stood surrounded by our discovery. White stumps of trees were there—white as the sand, white branches, forks and twigs, all scattered about or protruding from the surface of the dunes until the area resembled a forest destroyed by cannon fire.

Stooping, I picked up a small fragment of a branch. It crumbled. It was nothing but sand. My comrade's

foot, at that instant, plunged itself into a large trunk which immediately fell to pieces, as if made of ashes; and, although on closer observation we perceived that each particle was no more than a tiny granule, these were so crusted together as to resemble the texture of bark or the inner fibre of solid wood. There were unmistakable knots and jutting twigs; but they were sand, nothing but sand. They looked like sand; they felt and tasted like sand, and compared exactly with the sand upon which we walked.

These really uncanny fragments, we thought, must have been buried for ages beneath the dunes before our discovery of them; and, since it was apparent that they could not have withstood a single rain storm, they must have been exhumed by the wind only a few days before our arrival. Some kind of petrification, we thought; but an authority on geology, whom I had the fortune to interview some years later, told me that to his knowledge there was no petrification the texture of which could compare with the phenomenon described.

After this first adventure others carried me to several neighbouring "Isles of Nothing," where lay the wreckage of ships, the remnants of forgotten Indian tribes, and where deep caverns, more extensive and colourful than Italy's Blue Grotto of Capri, remained unknown not only to the tourist but to the average citizen of the State. Thus, by degrees, did "nothing" assume such contradictory proportions as to become nearly an obsession.

Guadalupe, I was given to understand, was, at best, a mountainous wart sticking out of the sea as a general hindrance to traffic, a hundred miles or more off the coast of Lower California. Being now somewhat

older, and having access to a larger vessel, I planned an expedition which, unfortunately, I felt unqualified to keep a secret. In consequence I was denied permission to take the craft into Mexican waters; and my conscience, now more bothersome than formerly, brought about an alteration of all my plans, although Guadalupe remained as a new objective I was not to forget.

It was a stronger manifestation of the old obsession that drove me later into the South Seas before the mast of a sailing vessel, with the desire of shipwreck on some—on *any*—God-forsaken spot surrounded by water! I was unfortunate enough, however, to call only at the *interesting* islands such as Oahu and Tahiti, where chewing-gum wrappers and phrases of “back home” were almost as prevalent as banana husks and the wind in the palm trees.

It was not until ten months ago that an opportunity to satisfy partially my hunger for islands of no importance came to me. It was presented, as it were, on a silver platter; and I snapped and gobbled it up like a starving pup confronted by a fillet steak. As guest and second mate aboard the *Velero II*, the first Diesel electric-drive yacht on the Pacific coast and built especially for the occasion, I was to join the G. Allan Hancock expedition into Mexican waters, it being planned that, besides employed engineers and fore-castle hands, there were to be six in the party, each member equipped along lines of some consequence to the venture. Here was a man, owner of a large and handsome yacht, looking for out-of-the-way places, and asking us, his future guests, to help him find them.

“Guadalupe!” I cried, almost before I had been

fully invited, and long before I could see my way clear for acceptance. "We'll go to Guadalupe Island!"

Guadalupe, eh? What the deuce could we hope to find there?

Nothing, and that was the beauty of it, I might have replied had I not suspected that Allan, my future skipper and host, would be apt to find little attraction in "nothing." He was not out for "nothing." He had told me that quite plainly. His expedition was to have a purpose. We were to work on behalf of a certain Chamber of Commerce for the sake of general commercial enterprise, or whatever else, gleaned from our experiences, might afford something of interest to the public at large. So I paused to answer, then:

"Have you ever heard of sea elephants?" I asked, hoping that this might have something to do with Chambers of Commerce and general commercial enterprise. "Strangest animal in the world! Eats sharks whole! Almost extinct. Barring the Antarctic, can't be found anywhere except on Guadalupe!"

He smiled very kindly, being a man of some patience; and I realize now that I had not been altogether sincere. I had baited a very small hook with sea elephants; and although I had been assured, not so long before, that these monsters could be seen on my island, I was no less certain that any visit of ours would find them away on vacation—whale-hunting, no doubt.

My elation, therefore, did not last; but months dragged by and, shortly before sailing, I discovered on the programme not only this particular island, but many others, although Allan's chief interests, I feared, were directed more toward the numerous unfrequented bays of the mainland.

We started our venture from San Pedro, touched at

San Diego, and would have continued thence for Guadalupe but for certain unforeseen circumstances that caused delay. Because of this I began to fear, in my impatience, that the long *détour* involving my island, and two others far more remote, would be scratched from the schedule. I began to fear, too, that the curiosity aroused by those regions was not what it should be. The members of our party talked too much of the *interesting* places such as Mazatlan, La Paz, Tepic and Guadalajara. I had seen none of these towns; but, knowing them to be towns put me in mind of chewing-gum wrappers and the phrase of “God’s country,” or the sight of some fat woman from “the States” wearing a Mexican *manton* and a peon’s sombrero just to be doing, as it were, “*like the Romans!*” So I flaunted my sea elephant; a strange and ferocious animal was he. He jumped backwards off cliffs; and rearing up on his pectoral flippers—*pectoral* lends weight to any flipper—was taller than a man! Almost extinct too, and ate sharks whole!

I half believed what I said, though I was quite certain no one else did. They had lived longer than I, and had learned to check their dreams. They knew we should find no sea elephants; and even if it proved the contrary, what then? Was I going to ask one to pose for a portrait photograph?

As it happened, I was. I did not know it then, but now Guadalupe Island is for me a thing of the past, although I tell myself constantly that some day I shall be going back again.

CHAPTER II

SEA MONSTERS

It was early morning, shortly after the sun had slipped from below the long swells, when George, our photographer, now standing wheel, called me from the chartroom and pointed.

I looked, telephoned the skipper, then with the aid of glasses looked again. Towering up above a shoe-string cloud and looming black below, were the shadowy ranges of my island, rising four thousand five hundred feet above the sea. Suspense appeared to check the yacht in her modest nine knots till she seemed to be standing still; and I had to smother my impatience until noon, doing my part at the breakfast table and again at luncheon, as if eating had anything to do with it.

Meanwhile we had rounded North Point; and here the sea rose up to shimmering breakers, its surface glaze, with the prismatic blend of a rainbow, shattering as if into powdered glass. An offshore breeze came on with a lively chop, prancing out from the shadows of tall cliffs and high black ranges where, from a pine-tree ridge, sifting into the chasms below, a white cloud, frayed like a frozen cataract, moved down.

There were six of us on the bridge, pointing, chattering, but seldom taking our eyes from the binoculars, nor our fingers from the adjustment screws. Pine trees—they were strangely out of keeping up there in

those barren surroundings. They reminded one of some artificial set implanted by a film director.

The engineer on duty popped up and down from his companion way like a Jack-in-the-Box. Bob the bo's'n, standing in his sedate manner on the forecastle head, drew heavily upon his pipe, smiled and drove all hands back to work. I sympathized rather with his charges. Work is a mean thing when you feel, all the time, that you might be missing something better. We were not simply mooning at the scenery, but, every time the surge swept back from the waste of rocky shore, we gazed from the shiny back of one round boulder to another, hoping vainly to discern some movement or grotesque shape that might be identified with the monsters of Guadalupe.

Why was it that this island, and this island alone, had been chosen, by sea elephants as a home? There was the mystery. Sea elephant—and he was fast going the way of the otter—his race was nearly done. There was the romance. And our acquaintance with him, if such were to be granted, would be adventure. Guadalupe Island—a small body of land surrounded by water.

We drew closer; but, of course, not close enough. The skipper was torn between imaginary sea elephants and, what was more important, the safety of his vessel. Yet we had to get farther in! Oh yes; I knew all about the inaccuracy of charts and the unyielding nature of rocks. . . .

But at that moment I discovered we were close enough. We had rounded a second promontory and were standing off from a long white beach, backed by great landslides and sheer cliffs of lava rising two thousand or more feet from the strand. Our glasses

were again to our eyes; and, after a moment of silence came the murmurs: "I wonder." . . . "Do you suppose." . . . "Yes, sir!" . . . "No."

"Yes!" I contradicted; for it seemed that even a doubt, if made known, were sufficient to turn all my precious sea elephants into stone.

"Only rocks," someone said, echoing my fears.

"Only seals—sea lions," put in another.

But I had seen many sea lions, some almost mammoth in size; and, although our distance from shore made it difficult to judge proportions, these objects were too large. Then, too, seals or sea lions, as I had observed, were, when beached, found huddled together, while these creatures, if creatures they were, lay with great distances between them as if, while desiring company, they abhorred intimacy.

Allan put us in closer, brought up into the swell and ordered the launching of the skiff and motor tender. "Arch," ship's physician, together with one of the boys of the forecastle and myself were assigned to the skiff and appointed as a committee of three to land and investigate. We made hasty preparations; Arch, arming himself with a long revolver and a lariat, I, with a sheath knife and Kodak; and, in a short time, towed by the tender, we were racing in toward the shore.

With the launch beating a devil's tattoo every time her exhaust emerged from a wave, we dared not venture too close for fear of frightening the possible prodigies into the sea. Then the possible became the probable, and the probable a certainty. We waved a hasty farewell to the motor tender, chose a landing spot concealed from the main strand by high rocks, watched our strokes through the breakers, put ashore and



SEA ELEPHANTS. GUADALUPE ISLAND

crept cautiously over the round-backed, slippery boulders to the beach of sea monsters. And they were nothing less, measuring, we judged, twelve to eighteen feet from nose to tail-tips. We counted a dozen, lying at measured intervals of some thirty paces and with almost geometric similarity of position.

I fixed my attention upon a heavy, long lump of wrinkled blubber in the immediate foreground. This animal, like all his beach mates, lay as if snoozing, his belly toward us and his foretop flipper resting tranquilly upon his chest. Perhaps he was dead. Maybe all of them were dead—killed by some recent calamity as strange and mysterious as the creatures themselves. They lay like so many drift logs washed up by the tide.

Moving closer, however, I perceived that my guess was wrong. I had picked up a number of small pebbles; but, before I could make up my mind to toss one of these, up moved a flipper. Now the animal was scratching himself, emitting a throaty wheeze like the snorty gurgle of a flooded carburettor.

Perry, the foremast hand accompanying us, hurriedly snapped a picture. Arch standing close beside me, coiled his lariat. I wondered if he intended using it, though I knew, from tales of his ranch experience, that he was not unskilled with a rope.

“Come on!” he said, addressing the animal. “Get up, there!”

But Mr. Elephant did not move. I tossed a pebble that bounced along his wrinkled neck. Mr. Elephant did not move. I tossed another, this time with more force. Mr. Elephant did not move. I hurled a third, a fourth—I hurled them all. He did not move. I threw a rock. The results were the same. Feeling

somewhat slighted by this total lack of response, I picked up a boulder and bounced it gently over his side. Mr. Elephant shrugged his shoulders, twitched and wheezed again, his fantastic trunk becoming slightly inflated, but his eyes remaining closed.

"Sleeping influenza," grinned the doctor.

However, it was evident that the creature had been embroiled not so long before in tribal warfare. The wrinkled hide, probably an inch in thickness, was here and there lacerated and bleeding; and even in his dreams he was fighting still. He sometimes forgot to breathe. He wriggled beneath his skin; he quaked all over, and waved his prehensile flippers in an attitude of sudden panic.

Feeling some compassion, therefore, we left him to battle with his imaginary foes and proceeded to Elephant Number Two. Number Two was more animated. He gave us to understand that boulders annoyed him tremendously and that he was not a little concerned over our unseemly obtrusions. He even opened his eyes and brought them to a direct focus, first upon Perry, then upon Arch and me. Encouraged thus far, it became my purpose to make him rise up on his fore flippers. So, snapping my fingers over his eyes, I bellowed:

"Up now! Come on! Up!"

Let me mention here, apropos of this attempt and others, that whenever it becomes your pleasure to play with sea elephants, a most effective step towards this end lies in the simple act of snapping the fingers over your elected playmate's eyes. As a rule a boulder sufficiently large to make an impression could scarcely be wielded by the average man, and it would not be quite sportsmanlike to employ a catapult or derrick.

The former method, at least, is the more humane. And it works. Arch, Perry and I had many memorable frolics with sea elephants on the strength of this discovery; and even now I found myself staggering back for a balance and staring into a mouth large enough to nip off my head as easily as one might bite the tip from a stalk of asparagus.

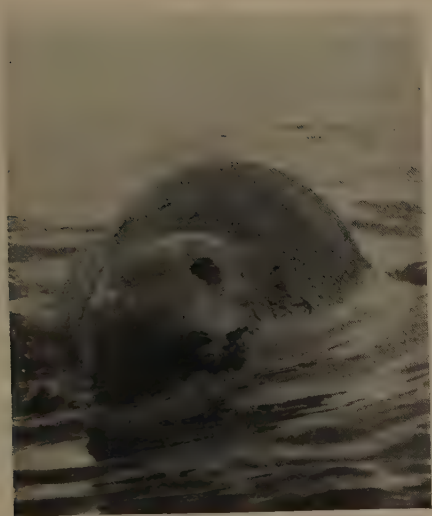
Arch laughed while I, with the mad desire to have a picture of this one, fumbled tremblingly for a focus on my Kodak. But my elephantine playmate, with mouth open so wide that his great proboscis hung within, was humping amidships, gurgling, grunting and hauling stern-first for the breakers.

At that instant I heard the swish of a rope and saw the noose fall true. We had him! Perry was already assisting the doctor with his "catch." I joined them. We had him now for sure! Or (and we were tugging), more accurately (and we were puffing), he had us (and we were grunting)—all three. We pulled with all our might. We sat down and dug our heels into the sand; but it was like pulling against a motor tractor; and, to complete the figure, we comprised the plough. The sand gave way before us, like the surge at the bows of a ship. The seat of my trousers was already registering the friction when Mr. Elephant, evidently becoming conscious of a slight resistance, hove about. He gained speed as he did so, assuming a humpty-dumpty clip too fast for our comfort. We arose in a body, sheered to this side, sheered to that in vain attempt to gain a rock about which to make a round turn of the line. But even had we succeeded, as later experience was to teach us, the strength of our rope was no match for that of these monsters; and, in our present predicament, a sheath knife was all that saved

the greater part of the lariat. Mr. Elephant broke through the surge and was off.

He did not disappear, however, as we had expected. Sea elephants have a way of knowing what is expected and doing the opposite. Expect them to move tail first and they go head first; head first, they go tail first. Expect them to attack and they prove friendly; expect them to be friendly, and they attack—very playfully, however. At least they gave us to understand that, on the whole, there was not a vicious cockle to their elephant hearts. They harbour no suspicions, no grudges. Even after we had dropped boulders upon their backs and tightened nooses about their necks, they found no reason to believe that our actions were caused by anything but the utmost kindness and consideration. Elephant Number One had opened his eyes long enough to see his fellow safely in the water; but now that the game was over, he slept again. Number Two, still puzzled by our uncalled-for actions, had swung about in the breakers, and now, head and shoulders above water, he remained in an attitude of casual observation, bobbling up and down like a kindly old woman out for a dip. We laughed at his lugubrious expression, and as we proceeded to Elephant Number Three, here came Number Two, hauling laboriously up the beach to his former place of repose. There he merged back into dreamland, too tired, no doubt, to notice what we were doing to his neighbour.

Arch shook his head. He had brought with him his long revolver; but he could no more have used it upon one of these bloated bundles of innocence than upon a friendly dog. Elephant Number Three was no exception in matters of disposition and general aplomb. He merely afforded an addition to the general



SEA ELEPHANTS. GUADALUPE ISLAND

rule, which was, in effect, that one has only to lasso a sea elephant's trunk to become master of the situation. Arch discovered this shortly after I had snapped my fingers over the eyes of our new acquaintance, who immediately sprang up upon his fore flippers to a height of perhaps eight feet. When the noose fell, his head was thrown back and his mouth open, which allowed the rope, on slipping up, to fasten itself about the proboscis. Try, as he did, to make for the surf, Arch held him. The trunk, forming a member of the breathing apparatus proved a vital part; and, venturing as close as we dared to the animal's jaws, we were obliged to cut the line. At that we watched him bump his way, tail first, into the sea, where he managed, after a time, to rid himself of the troublesome noose. He remained there sloshing about in the waves, where many others joined him as we continued our exercise, taking them as they came on our journey down the strand.

The first real evidence of hostility in our experience with these animals did not come until very late that afternoon, when, joining the rest of the party, we removed to a neighbouring beach. Joe, expeditionary interpreter and wireless operator, was handling the lariat; George his fifty-pound camera, and the rest of us whatever chanced to come into our grasp. There were only two sea elephants upon the beach, one of which, absolutely ignoring boulders, refused to respond even to my finger-snapping. The only recognition I was able to evoke came when I jumped upon his back and down—very quickly I confess—on the other side. On this occasion he turned his great head, rolled his dreamy brown eyes, then reposed again in all his characteristic serenity.

The other elephant, however, kept his gaze trained at all times upon us. Perhaps he had seen human beings before and had learned that the impudent creatures were not to be trusted. No sooner had I snapped my fingers over his eyes and sprung back for a snapshot than his head stretched forth, his jaws snapped close and with such impact that not only Kodak, but both hands might easily have parted company from their former owner. He objected strenuously to the attempt made to lasso him; and lost no time in galumphing down to the water; nor did he go backwards. He fairly whirled about, and by the rapid movements of his spine and fore flippers, he inch-wormed along at a semi-vaulting gait faster than a man walks.

Desiring a picture of him in the water, I followed until hip deep; then stopped. I would not have ventured farther for all the Spanish doubloons of the pirate dreams of my youth. There was a sudden display of almost graceful agility in the animal's movements. Like a seal, he whirled about through a hundred and eighty degrees almost before the water was navigable for his bulky carcass, and, in an attitude of challenge, brought up before me at a distance of less than ten feet, where he waited, his great eyes staring. He was in his element now. If I wanted to play, why didn't I come on?

But I wasn't that anxious. I managed only to take a long chance at a focus and snap the picture. The sun was low and dim; my adjustments were whatever they happened to be; I was no photographer to begin with, and I'm sure my Kodak was shaking like that poor aspen leaf that trembled so often for writers of old. Nevertheless the results of my long chance

brought forth the only picture from my Kodak that half approached my expectations. Luckily, however, we had a photographer and sea elephants to pose for him.

There was a period, more than a half-century ago, when these strange mammals, at one time considered on the point of extinction and estimated to number only one hundred and fifty all told, were common, inhabiting the Pacific shores of this continent, and its off-lying islands, in vast herds. They were called by old Californians, "Elephantos Marinos," and even at that early date it was recognized as a curious fact that the species was known in no other waters.

An extract from Captain Charles M. Scammon's "Marine Mammals of the Northwest coast of North America," published in 1874, reads: "A fat bull, taken at Santa Barbara Island by the *Mary Helen* in 1852 was eighteen feet long and yielded two hundred and ten gallons of oil. . . . The oil produced is superior to whale oil for lubricant purposes and, when used in the lamp, gives a clear, odourless and smokeless flame. . . . Owing to the continual pursuit of these animals, they have become nearly if not quite extinct on the Californian coast, or the few remaining have fled to some unknown point for security."

Guadalupe Island was later discovered as the refuge, the worth of which may depend now upon the enforcement by the Mexican Government of certain protective legislation; for, obviously, the sea elephant, confronted by man, is helpless. His warfare seems confined to his own species; and this, perhaps, only at the season of mating, when the female is to blame. She and her surviving sisters gather into an exclusive little pack while the males swim forth to contest for the grand

prize. It is a case now of "all or nothing," for the lone victor will be recognized as the prospective and worthy sire of the coming generation, while the many vanquished will be obliged to retire to the remote beaches for convalescence, and anticipation perhaps of "better luck next time."

The female is much smaller, averaging perhaps only ten feet over all to the male's eighteen. She has only a slight suggestion of a proboscis, and therefore resembles more her cousin the sea lion. She is said to bear seldom more than one cub at a time, the period of gestation being about twelve months.

The main subsistence of the sea elephant is not definitely known; but it is considered probable that cuttlefish and other cephalopods comprise much of it. In the stomachs of the adults have been found various marine plants, and also, on many occasions, small pebbles, the latter having been responsible in the past for a saying by sailors that "they take on ballast before they go down." I believe, however, that a sea elephant, like a seal, is fond of nearly all fishes—especially the oily kinds. I have seen cubs—these many years ago on exhibition—swallow a small shark or "dog-fish" whole, the fish measuring about two feet in length, the baby animal perhaps only twice as much.

CHAPTER III

THE DESERT ISLAND

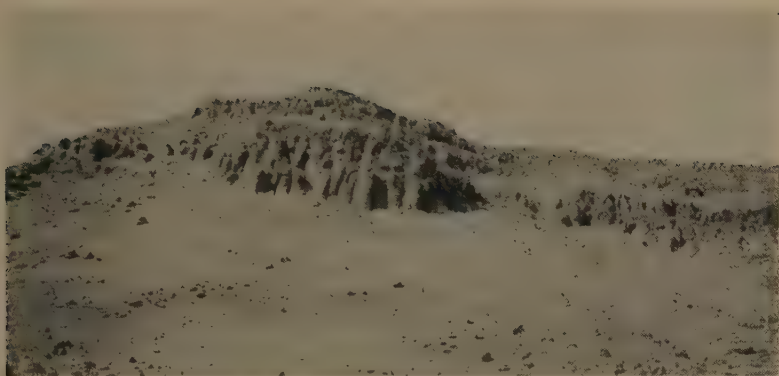
No sooner had we returned aboard than Arch and I were anxious to put ashore again. The investigations made by our party during the short afternoon had been too highly specialized in sea monsters to admit of perspective. We had given little heed to the general nature of the island, and had forgotten completely certain warnings tendered upon our departure from San Pedro. The island was a notorious refuge of smugglers. It had been so ever since the days of the buccaneers. There were reports, not yet cold, of outlaws who, while employing the vicinity for the main part as a smuggling base, regarded American yachts as profitable bi-products of the profession. Other small vessels had ventured here before ours and not all of them had returned, it being no difficult feat for these brigands, masquerading as Mexican officials, to board any unsuspecting craft and, once aboard, make away with her. The *Velero*, however, had come well armed, having, besides one small machine gun, seven rifles and as many short arms; but the sight of sea elephants had been diversion enough; and at the time "pirates" did not exist for us. Nor did we discover later any traces of their presence. Guadalupe, as we were to assure ourselves, was deserted.

The island, lying about one hundred and thirty-five

miles somewhat south of west from the nearest point of the Mexican Peninsula, and separated therefrom by a channel nearly three miles deep, is of volcanic origin, about twenty miles long north and south and from three to seven miles wide, its shores being in general black and ponderous bluffs of lava. It is traversed throughout by a chain of mountains, the most lofty of which, at the northern end, rises to a height of four thousand five hundred feet and comprises a part of the only fertile area of the land. The rest is parched and barren, granting life to not even a patch of cactus.

This information is taken, in part, from hydrographic data, which informed us further that "there were numerous goats on the island in 1892" when Her Majesty's ship *Melpomene* made surveys. We were not investigating for the Crown, but it would give me pleasure to inform it that the goats are still there; and, I venture to think, in far greater numbers than before—black goats, white goats, dappled goats and tan; goats by the hundreds and thousands, trampling, bleating regiments of them.

We noticed them first at sunset while we lay-to for the night several miles off an old abandoned barracks. Twilight granted us a last generous peep at a God-forsaken and cruel desolation. Resting upon a low bluff and amid the shadows of tumbled dwellings was a square squatting adobe building, white and symmetrical as a sarcophagus. Behind it a deep ravine snaked upwards between landslides and tomb-like files of boulders; and above it, brushed still by the mist, rose the loftiest ranges of Guadalupe, stark naked save at the very summit, where bristled the mysterious pines. Pocked and wrinkled was the crust of the land;



A TYPICAL RIDGE



ABANDONED BUILDINGS

GUADALUPE ISLAND

and if islands were given to the growing of hair instead of grass, this one would have been in the last stages of mange. Nor could I help picturing little insects creeping along—black ones, white ones, dappled ones and tan, creepy little horned things with beards; for so seemed the thronging descendants of the goats of 1892 as we re-discovered them from the deck of the *Velero*.

After a roly-poly night in the trough of the sea, several of us landed at the deserted post. Evidently it had been occupied, not more than a year before our arrival, by a small troop of Mexican soldiers, unless, indeed, the faded uniforms of red and blue that we found had been employed, for certain purposes already mentioned, by outlaws. It was obvious, however, that the small adobe building had been used as a hospital. We found crude semblances of beds, old mouldy and torn bits of bedding, shelves of bottles bearing the labels of sundry drugs, a crippled operating table and other surgical equipment together with heaps of beer bottles, and the remains of Mexican saddles, of mule-shoes, of horse-shoes, of splintered shovels and picks and of dilapidated cooking utensils. Most of the shacks were built of drift wood; some being no larger than a hound's kennel and resembling it, with due respect to the hound, in more ways than one; but there were others more formidable, one of which bore a painted inscription, worded first in Spanish, but with this translation below: "Prohibit by law kill or capture elephant sea." And may the responsible Government be congratulated for the restriction.

Weary of rummaging, we proceeded up the southerly slope of the canyon. There had been a trail at one time. We found traces of it here and there, but it

was not long before it disappeared entirely. There were goats in plenty, but no paths of their making, as the ground was hard and so covered with rocks that only the tiny hoofs of these animals could find footing between them. It was as if the entire island, after some terrific volcanic explosion, had been pelted with boulders.

Leaving Arch and the boatswain to their hunting, I spent the morning in an attempt to gain the ridges of pines; but, like most conspicuous ridges, it kept moving away. Progress was difficult—almost maddening. There were times when it was like walking over marbles, like having ball-bearing soles to one's shoes! The foremost foot rolled forward; the hindmost foot rolled back; and more often, on the steeper slopes, both feet rolled together. There were times, not quite so trying, when it was like walking over cannon balls; and, strangely enough, the various sizes of round volcanic rock lay as if carefully segregated and confined to given areas. I rolled along over a quarter of a mile or so of the smaller ones, stumbled along over an equal distance of larger ones; then, to my great relief, they became so large as to necessitate my jumping from one to the other. It was variety, but with the "spice" extracted; and I had only to hope for the pleasing sensation of discovering that it was but a nightmare.

Having left my rifle behind, naturally I came upon vast, skirmishing armies of goats. I drove them before me while their plaintive bleating echoed from the sheer slopes across the ravine, the bottom of which, perhaps two thousand feet below, bore evidence of conducting a torrent of water during the wet season. This being the month of January, it was dry. Of winged creatures

on the island I was conscious mostly of a hovering swarm of gnats—gnats, which for some reason, refrained from biting; but there were birds in some numbers, linnets, sparrows and wild dove, the latter seeming to be unalarmed by my presence.

That afternoon, having returned to the yacht, we proceeded to an anchorage, Melpomene Cove at the south end, a shelter which, had it been in Oriental waters, might have been named "Dragon's Bay." The dragon stood out black against shelved cliffs of sandstone, which had been pushed up some time or other by a volcanic upheaval and chiselled by erosion in long sweeping parallel curves, which, as I learned later, offered good means of ascent. The dragon, at first taken for shrubbery, proved to be only a flaw in the strata and was composed of black stone.

This end of Guadalupe, where the mountains were comparatively low, seemed even more desolate than the other. There was no plant life, no signs of habitation, and from the low hooked point to the eastward broke a thunder of surge. On the sheltered side, we were able to land on a rocky bar beyond which we could see the long swells come marching down from the north-west to shatter themselves into white seething chaos, as if in a frenzied attempt to tear away the barrier that dared to block their way. Here were myriads of abalones. The shores were black with them. They crept, snail-like, over the backs of one another. They infested the strand like a plague of giant "lady bugs."

After spending the late afternoon and the early hours of the morning exploring what we could of the southern extremity, we up-hooked and bore down for Clarion Island, lying about seven hundred and fifty

miles to the southward. I had worn one pair of shoes completely through, and my feet were in a condition little less deplorable. One needs hoofs for travelling through the mountains of the peppered, plagued and pelted Guadalupe.

CHAPTER IV

GIANT AND LITTLE FISHES

I PREFER thinking of these lonely islands—Guadalupe which we had left behind and the Revilla Gigedo Group which we were soon to visit—as being small protruding peaks of mountains that are under the sea rather than small bodies of land surrounded by water; mountains through whose deep and purple canyons great goggle-eyed finned things come and stare, while the hermit-crabs sit on a chest of gold in the wreck of a pirate brig, while the tall kelp swings on its pods of air and the green-gold leaves hang down; where the sun is a shadowy, shifting gleam, where the stars may never see, and where silence is, as silence was born, and as silence was meant to be.

I don't mean to be poetic. I am merely thinking that the foundations of things are more important, generally, than their surroundings, that an island, the very foundation of which is the essence of mystery, should have something of that mystery included in its definition, thus lending some glamour even to a rock that juts out of the sea hundreds of miles from anywhere and with a depth of two or three thousand fathoms around it. There are many such danger dots on the chart, and I wonder how many others that are unrecorded.

During the early afternoon of our second day since leaving Guadalupe we passed a rock which, although

it rose more than twelve thousand feet from the ocean's floor, protruded from its surface scarcely the height of a barge-load of bricks. It might be likened better, however, to a tombstone, since it lies directly in the old track of sailing vessels, yet remained undiscovered until 1907!

More conspicuous are neighbouring rocks, distant in a north-westerly direction about twenty-seven miles, and named "Alijos," translated to mean—"rocks that land a ship's cargo." They were marked more than a century and a quarter ago by a Captain Marquina in coming from the Philippines. It is possible that the upstart little neighbour, unreported until 1907, was not there at the time. Geology tells us that these regions are in a period of rapid formation; that the lands, in general, are rising; although their future existence may depend largely upon their powers to withstand, during that period of rise, the undermining forces of the sea.

With this in view, it may be interesting to note that, according to reliable reports of 1915, the Alijos Group comprised, along with numerous smaller rocks, four principal ones; but that, at the time of our passage eight years later, only three of the latter remained. The group, at a distance, was said to resemble a ship under sail; but now it is evident that one "sail" has carried away, and another, to judge from its listing, has not long to stand, unless by chance some gentle volcanic upheaval were to grant it a reprieve, giving it a place among islands.

There are numerous "doubtful islands" scattered over the seas. The Revilla Gigedo Group, discovered in the beginning of the sixteenth century by early Spanish navigators, comprises four charted islands;



THE ALIJOS ROCKS



MONUMENT ROCK. CLARION ISLAND

yet, from time to time, there have come reports of several mysterious neighbours, no trace of which could later careful search reveal. However, it would be unfair to deduce that the existence of these "doubtfuls" is thereby disproved; that they are mere "pipe dreams" or idle yarns of mariners. One often hears of the "Now-you-see-it—and now-you-don't" variety of conjuring; and from certain evidence of volcanic activity which we were to discover later in the vicinity, it seems not improbable that these waters are prone to such tricks.

They were magic waters, at any rate, fairly teeming with the spectacular and wriggling with life. With a squid aboard that had washed there, and a flying-fish aboard that had flown there, and escorted by a galloping herd of porpoises, high-flying "bosuns" and frigate birds, together with an impudent breed of tern or "noddy" that dared even to strut about upon our awnings, we were rounding the north west point of Clarion Island, and surveying a remarkable object some two hundred feet high, called Monument Rock. Cut off from the island proper and surrounded by numerous pinnacles, arches and turrets of fantastic design, it rose in nearly symmetrical steps to a blunt-topped cupola, and its almost square base, surmounted by a pyramidal shaft comprising alternate slabs of deep red and grey, gave it the appearance of ancient Egyptian masonry.

Clearing the second promontory, and making our course toward Sulphur Bay, we came now upon shoals of Spanish mackerel. Here and there, like tiny black sailed sloops—some hove to, others slicing the surface at a tremendous clip—were the fins of man-eaters; and larger ones I have never seen, even in the waters

of Hawaii. There were also the huge dark forms of devil rays, measuring, we estimated, not less than twenty feet in breadth. Like mammoth bats they struck along. In the clear water, just beneath the surface, we could see them distinctly, winging a deliberate course, or swerving abruptly and sometimes banking their turns to such an extent that the uppermost fin, curved like a dolphin's, emerged from the waves to the height of a man.

This kind of ray, called "manta," belonging to the family of "skate," and hence, remotely, to that of the shark, is more dreaded by pearl-fishers than any other monster of the sea. It is a common belief that the creature is capable of enveloping a man within its vast expanse of wing, then, bit by bit, munching and crunching at leisure, devouring him completely. Science, however, holding the opinion that the manta's powerful beak is constructed solely for the purpose of cracking the shells of pearl-oysters, cockles, mussels and so forth, attributes no such voracity to the monster, although it acknowledges that, if harpooned or otherwise attacked by man, a more valiant fighter never swam the seas. For my part, with all due respect to authorities, I should be unwilling to put their theory to the test.

We were, however, not then particularly concerned with rays and sharks. Not only were we seeking suitable anchorage, but were preoccupied by sights more spectacular. A whale emerged suddenly upon our port bow, passed below the keel, broke surface directly upon our starboard quarter and made casually for the offing, where vast herds of them went gallivanting along the skyline, ripping it into flying fragments of white.

That wasn't all. Like a great rock disgorged by a

submarine volcano, a dark body shot into the air, carrying a mad sea with it. For an instant it seemed to defy all gravity. It remained suspended, then tumbled back; and, even from our distant point of observation, we could see great breakers rolling out from the shadowy splash. Nor was this a mere whale's caprice. It was battle; and, although we could at first discern no antagonist, later we were holding our breaths and checking our tongues, not daring to comment on the unbelievable; for, no sooner had the splash subsided than we beheld a long grey arm, tentacle-like, rise up from the froth, reach high into the air, swing over, check itself, bend, sweep back and disappear.

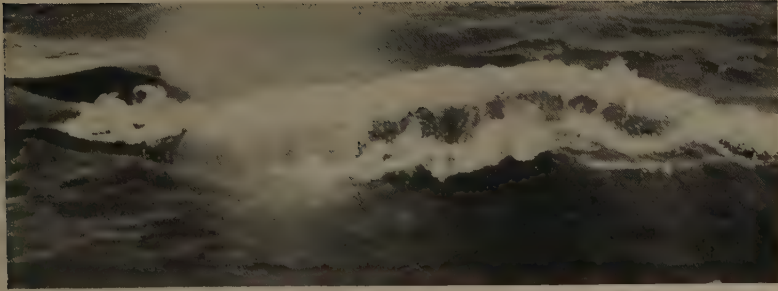
Captain T——, our chief mate, was a master of the old school and had spent no small part of his life aboard whalers. Allan, owner and skipper, was an experienced yachtsman. In fact, none of us had been raised, as it were, on the farm. Yet no one aboard would venture to identify the whale's assailant. We had only our opinions; and mine, I confess, inclined towards that loathsome monstrosity, the giant octopus. Giant, it surely was, but octopus—no; it couldn't have been.

I thought of the thresher shark. Perhaps its long whip-like tail, displayed at a distance, would resemble a tentacle; but science maintains that the thresher does not attack whales—this despite all reports to the contrary; that a whale's enemies are the orca, or killer, of the whale family, and the swordfish of the shark family. But this was no swordfish, certainly. For all the world it resembled an octopus—one large enough to seize our yacht and drag her under! Yet whoever heard of such a thing? and who would believe it? We could not, and were forced at length to accept the only remaining explanation that we knew.

The killer, probably the most voracious animal of the ocean, travels, wolf-like, in packs; and, although he attains a length only of about twenty feet, he is inclined, if hungry, to stop at nothing. Captain Charles M. Scammon writes that in the stomach of one small orca were found thirteen porpoises and fourteen seals. Although the creature possesses some characteristics of a whale, it carries a very prominent dorsal fin; and in some species this fin attains a height of seven feet, being narrow at the base and tapering upwards to a curved point. This offered a solution, but a very poor one, since what we had regarded as a tentacle seemed closer to fifteen or twenty feet than seven!

We saw it many times—the great whale whirling up from the water, falling back, writhing amid the tangle and chaos, then, invariably, the long arm, swinging, bending and disappearing as the struggle resumed anew. We wanted to go out for closer observation, but there was time only to find our holding ground in the bay before dark. We did so as the battle continued and a pageantry of other life went by. It was as if all creatures of the ocean had congregated there and been thrown suddenly into panic.

Two small eagle rays, apparently mad, we saw attempting to fly. They sprang from the water, four feet in the air; then, *plop!* we could hear them fall. At first they seemed to be turning somersaults; but it was only the shadows on their broad flapping sides that gave the appearance. Strictly speaking they had no fins; really they had no wings. Evidently they didn't care to remain in the water; plainly they were unable to keep to the air. They flipped up; they flapped down. Even after sunset, at intervals of about thirty seconds we could hear them, each trying to



"A WHALE, SPOUTING, EMERGED UPON OUR PORT BOW, THEN . .



BROKE SURFACE ON OUR STARBOARD QUARTER."

outdo the other. I was hoping that their sea-devil cousin, the manta, whose weight is often twelve hundred pounds, would not take a notion to flap up, and plop down in this manner upon one of our small boats! The manta has been known to jump great heights, and the sound of his fall has been compared to a clap of thunder.

No sooner had the anchor been let go than Arch, the doctor, had harpooned a shark; and with the help of all hands, dragged the monster aboard. Other fish snapped at naked hooks. Allan hauled them in by the dozen. He had only to trail his line twice over the surface; when *snap!* And every snap was a strike, and every strike was a catch. There were Spanish mackerel, bass and great numbers of larger fish shaped very much like a "sheep's head," but more gamey and enterprising in nature. We caught so many before dark that, after freeing more than half of them, our refrigerators were overloaded.

One may hesitate in accepting fish stories; but Clarion Island, as anyone may be assured by going there, is a counterpart in reality to some of the most extravagant yarns ever spun by a sailor or sportsman. For example, one often hears the remark: "Why, the birds were so tame they'd all but perch on the barrel of your gun!" Birds at Clarion are tamer than that. We saw one alight on the barrel of a gun—a gun that had just been fired and was about to be fired again. It happened on a morning when Arch and I were pulling along in a skiff not far from the yacht. The doctor had fired three times at a turtle and was now taking aim at a devil ray. The noddies, so called originally by sailors because of the birds' characteristic stupidity, had become curious and were gathering in

great numbers. I thought it quite remarkable when one perched on the transom of our boat. I thought it more remarkable, and damnably impertinent too, when one attempted to relieve me of my cap. Arch, however, was paying them little attention, being only subconsciously annoyed; and when, at last one came to roost on the barrel of his gun, interrupting his line of sight, he cursed, shook the thing off and peevishly renewed the aim. But the noddy made a second attempt. I burst out laughing; and the preposterousness of the incident dawned upon the doctor. We heard loud guffaws from the *Velero*; and, on returning, saw one of these silly creatures perched upon a davit and eating from a sailor's hand. Their trust in mankind rivals that of Guadalupe's sea elephants; and, for reasons peculiar to mankind, we, even while visiting their nests on shore, allowed them to keep their foolish faith.

Clarion Island, the westernmost of the Revilla Gigedo Group, is about five miles long, and less than half as wide at the widest. It lies in a latitude somewhat south of Manzanillo, but is distant in a westerly direction therefrom nearly seven hundred miles. Its northern face is a series of perpendicular rocky cliffs, culminating in a sharp ridge, where, of three prominent peaks, one attains a height of eleven hundred feet. From a diminishing slope on the south side of the ridge, a flat plateau stretches to the sea in the neighbourhood of a dry lagoon and two sand beaches—the only places of the kind on the island. It was at some distance off this shore that the *Velero* had found her anchorage; and some distance, indeed, was necessary, there being a long reef a half-mile or more from the strand where seas broke incessantly.

Joe, Arch and I, however, had found a landing at the western extremity where the coral reefs were broken; and, after several vain attempts to weave our way inland through cactus—which, with the exception of a small area of seagrass, seemed to cover the whole island—we confined our explorations for the day to the coast.

There were no traces of habitation whatever, not even the semblance of a brush fence; and, if the unsuspecting natures of birds and fishes were a sign, the place had had no visitor for years. Wild doves, owls, crows, sea birds and song birds alike, gave no heed to the firing of rifles; and, although the doves were less bold than the others, they rarely took to wing unless we approached within ten feet of them, when they fluttered a few yards farther away.

The doctor, whose hobby, by the way, was to collect various specimens of possible value to natural science, and who would rather pickle sea cucumbers or preserve jellyfish than dress a sprained ankle, was captivated immediately by the pools which we found in the rocks beyond the eastern extremity of a long sand and coral beach. Rocky pools, of course, are common things along almost any strand when the tide is low; but nowhere, from the islands of the South Seas eastward to the coast of the Mediterranean, had I beheld any as rich as these.

Here at Clarion were natural ponds of black lava. They were pitted and festooned into grotesque, tiny caverns; they were tinted with orange, touched with jade, moss-draped green and buff. And there were rusty-red sea-porcupines, like potted desert plants; and hermit crabs, their legs bejewelled as if with emerald. There were snails with tinsel stripes of metallic rainbow

blend. There were lightning-darting zebra fish with manes. There were parrot fish with parrot shades, and silver-plated minnows, and peacock midgets rivalling them all. Particoloured blue and red, they carried silken fans; gay multichrome was splotched above their tails. They flashed about like darting flames or sailed through pastel caverns. It was a miniature carnival; fiesta day in the heart of Goblin Land.

We were in a coppery, crater-like hollow where great overhanging cliffs of lava stood protected from the breakers by extensive reefs. Here the long swells boomed up into spray while the dappled green of their wake whirled and tumbled in a hurtling maelstrom. Joe had wandered back to the sand, but Arch and I let an hour slip by before following him, then returned by way of a short-cut, it being possible to wade knee-deep from a point just behind the breakers on the coral bar to any part of the long sand beach. In this clear stretch of shoal there were fish in abundance—small ones, of course, since no creature of size would dare to venture over the jutting reef. Our only possible enemy, therefore, was the stingaree, as his giant relatives, the devil ray and shark, with which the waters beyond fairly reeked, were locked out.

As it happened, however, we did encounter two swordfish! Arch caught them in his net! And swordfish, as even the whale must know, are not to be trifled with. But it seems there are different kinds; and these happened to be less than four inches over all. More accurately speaking, they were sword *fishes*, for, although both had swords, they were no more related to each other than they were to the killer of whales. Comparing the three, the giant variety has a mouth



A SHARK CAUGHT AT CLARION ISLAND

below the hilt of his rapier; these had not. One of them, silver-scaled like a minnow, had been given a mouth above, while the other, scaleless and slippery brown, had a mouth at the very tip of his sword. The latter, Arch believed to be a rare specimen—a *fistularia tabacaria*; and he keeps it still among his pickled prizes.

Joe was waiting anxiously, and, upon our arrival, led us to a pool wherein he had put a small fish. Although we granted it was the yellowest, silliest, leopard-spottedest little fish we had seen so far, still, in the light of former investigation, it was not as phenomenal as Joe's attitude had led us to believe. In particular, we observed only that it wore a simple and somewhat pathetic kind of a smile and that it wobbled about within its small confines as if it were troubled by rheumatism.

"Quite a fish," I remarked.

"Quite!" agreed Joe. "Pick it up!"

I obeyed. The doctor smiled. I knew something was going to happen. I could "*feel it happening!*" The thing began slowly to swell in my hand. It inflated itself to twice its normal size. It became almost spherical. I thought it would burst, and hurriedly returned it to the water, where, on its back and with mouth and tail above the surface, it drifted along with the wind like a bright toy balloon. Joe was laughing.

"Watch!" he cried.

And while I stood there wondering, it gave a feeble croak, like that of a sick frog, and immediately diminished one third in size. It croaked again, this time collapsing to one half, then repeated the act until it had croaked itself down to normal, assumed a level keel and blithely wobbled downward and away. We

found great schools of them later. The bright yellow ones were rather scarce, the others wore a kind of blue gingham, in token, I suppose, of their characteristic simplicity.

These puffers, or globe-fish, are common to many seas; but this variety differed from others I had seen by the fact that it was without bristles or spines. It differed, too, in that the inflation seemed less confined to the lower portion of the body. In Hawaii the puffer's name when translated into English is "death-fish"; for there is said to be a "presence in the body of poisonous alkaloids by means of which the enemies of the species are destroyed in the death of the individual devoured." These alkaloids are also said to be present in the variety just described and are capable of producing paralysis and gastric derangement in men as well as in the lower animals, the result being often fatal. Poisonous bacteria may be destroyed in many fish by cooking; but these alkaloids are said to be unaltered by heat.

Later that afternoon we uphooked for Socorro Island. The flapper rays were flapping again. Whales were hurtling along the horizon. We attempted to reach them; but they held to the skyline; and this, until darkness fell, kept moving away.

The doctor stood aft gazing back toward Clarion. Allan, our host, had told him there was better ahead; but, for Arch, it was difficult to believe. Had we marooned him there, he would have been happy forever after; and he was a man somewhat after my own heart.



TERN OR NODDIES AT CLARION ISLAND

CHAPTER V

THE KING OF CLIPPERTON ISLAND

HAVING put two hundred miles between the *Velero* and Clarion, we were fast approaching the largest island of the Revilla Gigedos. Several of our party were gathered in the wheelhouse while Allan, leaning over the chart table, read aloud from the "Mexican Coast Pilot":

"Socorro," he began, referring to our next point of call, "may be said to consist of one mountain which rises from the deep water surrounding to a height of three thousand seven hundred and something feet." . . . Slurring hurriedly through another passage, he broke surface with: ". . . Ground covered with thick, almost impenetrable growth cactus and sage-like brush, branches of which so closely interwoven progress difficult, and so on. . . . Volcanic nature of island everywhere apparent, quantities of lava strewn slopes as if forced directly up from beneath surface . . . soil plentifully mixed with ashes, etcetera; the hill on east side Braithwaite Bay—that's where we're headed now—formed entirely of ashes. Surface broken by hummocks and crater-like mounds and some places furrowed by deep ravines walled with lava." The skipper skipped again, emerging this time with: "As there is an abundance of animal life on island it probably proves existence fresh water but none ever reported. Birds such as robins, canaries, swallows and

our neighbour Republic had answered this questioning by posting a small company of soldiers there to better establish the Mexican claim. It appeared that this guard was relieved every few months, when fresh supplies and fresh soldiers were brought by a vessel from Manzanillo. And it appeared also that every soldier was allowed the company of his wife or mistress. This made life easier for them, but also had consequences. Yet things continued smoothly enough till there came a time, during a topsy-turvy condition of civil strife, when the relief ship was stopped by someone who cared nothing about the island. The troops of Clipperton were forgotten. Five years slipped by.

Not long ago, some member of the existing Government was struck by a horrible thought. He went to certain authorities. He called for certain records. He puffed a cigarette and blinked his eyes. *Ah Dios!* And white-hot grew the wires between Mexico City and Manzanillo. Nor was it long before an expedition put out to gather the bones. Bones it found; but these, as it happened, were not naked ones. They had skin on them—black negro skin in one instance, and very much animated at that. They comprised the King, the living ruler of Clipperton Island; and with him were fourteen wives. Of some fifty soldiers left there so long before, however, only one survived. The others—Wha sho nuff! Dey's been dead *lo-ong* time. Died ob skerby; so hep me!

It is said that woman has more passive endurance than man. She can stand more hunger, more thirst, exposure, weariness and cold; but now the question was asked: was her sex characterized further by an immunity from scurvy, or whatever it was that had carried away two score or more able soldiers?



"VELERO II."



A SHORT-FINNED SPECIES OF ORCA

Well, peered jes dat way like, didn't it?

For sustenance, it was explained, the negro and his many wives used the eggs of sea birds and whatever else the ocean afforded them; and, during the rains, they managed to collect water in sufficient quantities to tide them over to the next shower. Clipperton Rock, a castle-like object at the south-eastern edge, proved a safe retreat during the squalls and hurricanes. In short the entire company might have fared quite well had it not been "fo de skerby." So might the negro have fared quite well, even after his rescue, had it not been "fo dem fo-teen ladies; 'cause one ob dem got jealous an' done betrayed de king."

Eugene O'Neil's "Emperor Jones" was given a near sequel in reality by the jealous "lady's" story of what had happened since His Majesty the King of Clipperton, through his own influences and personality, had established himself as ruler. He had led a mutiny against the officers, then taken the sceptre of supreme authority—an authority, as it proved, of life and death—death preferred.

One by one, as his subjects displeased him, they were shot or otherwise disposed of; while he, being a conscientious gentleman of scruples, assumed the care of the widows whom he honoured as queenly heads of the royal family. Every Government is plagued by its undesirables, and, in this case, plagued to such an extent that only the women proved worthy of the rule. His Majesty, even after all but three of his subjects had been executed, was not unconscious of plots against the throne; so, taking advantage of a very dark night, and perhaps a rifle from the royal arsenal, he established a beautiful peace throughout his empire. Indeed it was no less than a Garden of Allah. With his many

wives he might have lived happily ever after had not some member of a barbaric nation over the seas been stricken with that horrible thought. *Ah Dios!* The result was tragic.

If the story is true—and I believe it is—the King of Clipperton Island was condemned to death and executed in a prison of Mexico not so long ago.

Here lies one adventure that rose from the grave of an island—an island “with nothing on it”; and it is folly to believe that the ghosts of many more do not hover there still. At Socorro, even as we groped cautiously into Braithwaite Bay, I felt the presence; and others felt it too.

CHAPTER VI

THE " INFERNO "

OUR anchors down, our engines stopped, suspense hung over us like the shadows and stillness of a passing day. Captain T—— sighed. Allan gazed about like one who, after a long journey, returns home to find the front door locked, the blinds down and the dog-kennel yawning into vacancy. Unlike our call at Clarion Island, few birds came to greet us; no porpoises, no whales, no rays; not even a shark. The waters seemed more or less sluggish, dead; and the wet beach, cobbled with steel-grey boulders, gleamed coldly from a gloom of lava bluffs. A scrubby stretch of high mountain had crumpled itself behind, with naked red volcanic mounds protruding. We could see great patches of green and brown, deep rifts, low hills of ash; and there were heaps of dull black slag strewn everywhere. The entire island, at the time, put me in mind of a half-burned trash pile, quenched by a shower and left, without even the strength to smoulder, in a puddle of inky rain.

George's guess was not far amiss. Socorro seemed a dreary place; and, after a short trip ashore before dark, Arch felt the oppression perhaps more than anyone. No colourful pools to compare with those of Clarion; no fishes to compare with those of Clarion; no birds to compare with those of Clarion; no sand beaches, no calm shoals, nothing! Joe mentioned

wild sheep. He had seen great herds of them—sorry game for a huntsman, but game nevertheless, and plenty of it. Then too—this for the skipper's sake—poor fishing in Mexican waters was as yet unknown. To find it here would be to discover something. Some satisfaction in that. He grinned across the table at George and me, adding :

“ And I'll take you both exploring in the morning—*Joe's personally conducted tours through the wilds of Socorro ! Meals served on board at regular hours ! Bring your own equipment. Wheel-chair and telescope required !* ”

George accepted the offer gladly, but these men travelled too fast for me. With their telescopes they had scaled the highest peak and returned before we had let go the anchor ; they had explored every square inch of the island as far as eyes could see, and they had wound up the excursion by a brisk little swim to the horizon and back before dinner. I couldn't hope to strike that pace ; so, early the next morning, I set out alone.

It was no mere jaunt. The rocky slopes of Guadalupe Island were paved highways compared with this—this maddening, tearing maze of eight-foot brambles, this undergrowth of cactus, sharp, broken stumps and dead tangle of vines. Every step was a crackle and a smash ; every crackle was a scratch, every smash was a jab ; every stumble was an ankle, or a shin, or a knee or an arm or a hand full of cactus. Two yards ahead—very little of that—was all that I could see ; and then to climb, climb, climb . . . it wasn't easy.

At length I came to a barren spot of a deep brick-red soil, evidently an old crater, one wall of which had been carried away. It formed a perfect amphitheatre

and seemed to have held water some short time in the past. A herd of sheep, thrown suddenly into panic by my intrusion, charged, stampeded, and clatter-hoofed down the slopes, smashing themselves into invisibility through the thicket. Like the goats of Guadalupe, they were the descendants of a small herd marooned by the whalers in times long past. I wondered where they found their fresh water, which to the knowledge of the American Admiralty was as yet an undiscovered resource of Socorro Island.

Looking westward from the top of the mound, I could see the long, low ranges of volcanic slag piled like coal along the tracks of a giant railway, and extending in irregular and broken veins to the vicinity of Braithwaite Bay, where lay our vessel. A precipitous and rocky canyon led to the same cove, but, on both sides of it, save where the black recement was heaped, there were only the hills of tangle-brush, split apart, in places, as if by recent earthquakes.

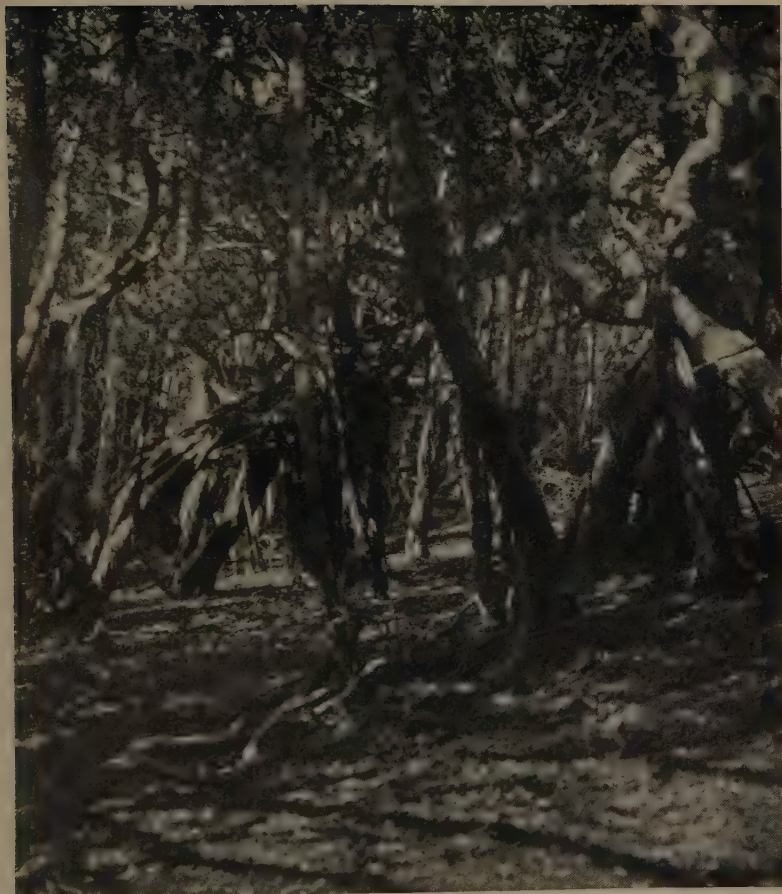
To the north and east, however, things were more interesting. At the foot of the crater I had come upon a scrub banyan tree which, as I discovered now, was a mere out-cropping of a dense wood. Shade had long since borne its appeal, so I struck out for it—and into it, little guessing the nature of my undertaking.

I shall never forget the tangle, the seeming endlessness, the sense of enchantment, the feelings of panic, bewilderment and loneliness, that filled me during the next three hours or more of travel. It was not a wood, but a wilderness; each banyan tree with hundreds of trunks, each trunk with thousands of branches, each branch with pendulous twisted shoots, matted foliage and parasite vines, all this becoming thicker and thicker, and in places impenetrable. More

often than not, I was obliged to retrace my—I cannot say *steps*, for most of the time I was crawling, or scrambling over the tops of things, climbing, stumbling, falling and wondering what in the world it was that urged me farther.

Before entering the jungle, I had, in order to hold a course toward a certain ridge, made mental notes of the fact that my shadow was to lie on my left, and somewhat behind. Otherwise, likely as not, I should be moving in circles. But now the sifted rays of sun became lost overhead; the gloom merged into near darkness; my shadow was gone. Pale green and white was the knotted chaos of undergrowth. It was interwoven, matted, entwined among roots, branches, and the fibrous tendrils of banyans. It blocked me here; it turned me there; it became such a foul labyrinth that even had I been willing to go back I should have been quite uncertain as to the direction. Anxiously I hunted feeble shafts of day that might afford new bearings. Sometimes I found them; but then came the realization that time had lapsed, that the sun was moving fast across the sky; that a necessary allowance would have to be considered in respect to my shadow. How much allowance to make was the problem.

Several times in the past I had surprised small herds of sheep, frightening them into a stampede, but now the low, blind clearings of their making were no more. Even sheep cared not to venture here. Whether or not other kinds of animals inhabited the island, I had no idea. I knew only that in equal latitudes of the mainland there were wildcats, tigers, not to mention boa constrictors and rattlers. Indeed, we had killed a large snake on Clarion, an island more distant from



BANYAN TREES, SOCORRO ISLAND

the coast than this. Were boas and rattlers improbable, then? Were wildcats and tigers impossible, then? And here was I, unarmed, save for a small sheath-knife.

So be it. I had really encountered nothing to arouse such thoughts. Friendly birds and bright blue-spotted lizards by the thousands—nothing more; although when the jungle was darkest and thickest, when rooted banyan shoots, heavy and twisted like mammoth corkscrews, twined down on all sides, loneliness preyed upon my imagination. I could see great snakes moving in the trees; and the mere flutter of a canary was enough to whirl me about and send a cold tremor down my spine. Then, too, there was something uncanny in the naked shapes of things. Dante's conception of certain regions, I thought, must have grown from a banyan wilderness. In every tree was the aspect of a tortured being, reminding one of that portion of Hades where spirits of men and women are described as taking root, sprouting and growing into distorted forms of agony. There was the reminder, too, of another realm where condemned souls writhed in eternal torment amid a pestilence of serpents; and, strangely enough, although I did not know it then, I was soon to discover something resembling very much one of the fiery pits, created by the Italian poet as tombs for heretics. I was, indeed, passing through the "Inferno" as illustrated by Gustave Doré; but without a guide, and often inclined to doubt my own shadow when it chanced to show itself.

I was confronted more and more by the impenetrable, obliged to turn back, to try this way and that, until I expected at any moment in my many circular or forkwise courses to meet myself bound in an opposite

direction. Anything was possible now. I became desperate. A blind determination bordering on panic laid hold. I climbed the unclimbable, smashed the unbreakable, crawled under the uncrawlunderable and hacked things to pieces. Nothing else could have got me through, and at last I found myself on top of the ridge in view of future prospects.

Prospects ! At first I saw none. I was in another area of tall brambles surrounded by the infernal wilderness of banyans. I had come from the southward. I did not care to go back. To the eastward and northward the jungle seemed denser than ever ; but across a deep wooded ravine to the westward was a clearing. Evidently it had once been a part of the jungle ; but appeared now to have been devastated. Tornadoes are not unknown in these waters. There was, farther on, a desolate range of broken lava, leading favourably toward the sea. I had only to penetrate the narrow canyon of hell-trees to gain the clearing. I did so, and drew my first full breath of relief since leaving the old crater.

Imagine walking over dumped coke and you have some idea of the nature of my homeward trail. In the process of being forced up from below, the substance had been crushed and broken into great chunks or slabs as black as pitch and as porous as Swiss cheese. It was heaped high enough to enable one to see over the tops of the brambles through which it led ; and despite the uncertainty of footing, it was, compared with other territory, like walking on air.

And, as it happened, on air I nearly walked. The ridge came up to a low mound, "and was not !" A pit about fifteen feet in diameter and black as the devil's boots, yawned before me. Instinctively I drew back

in awe of it, realising, though not for the first time during that day, that travelling alone through this country was not the safest thing in the world. Nor was this small crater or "blow hole" any safer. As viewed from its brink, it was about thirty feet deep; its floor, a huge bubble, inflated to the bursting point, then cooled and cracked; its walls, perpendicular, smooth-surfaced lava which, at a depth perhaps half-way down, fell away so that it was impossible to judge the size of the cavern below. But on tossing a fragment of lava I could hear it roll; and, for aught I knew, had the floor's slope been steeper, it might have continued rolling indefinitely.

The nature of the place more than whetted my curiosity; but, though I tried to contrive means of descending, I was obliged to postpone the venture for the following day, and to make my way back over the slag, through the brambles and on, by way of a deep rocky ravine, to the yacht. There, despite plans made to sail in the morning, Allan granted more time; and, with Arch and me, set out in the following forenoon for the "blow hole."

We had packed a long line; and, by means of it, descent was a simple matter. The chamber proved no disappointment. We estimated the cavern to range between eighteen and thirty feet in diameter. The floor, apparently of solid lava, was heaped here and there with broken substance where portions of the walls or ceiling had tumbled away. Water dripped constantly from tiny protuberances that resembled stalactites in the early stages of formation; and shades of purple, green and red were blended there. Black shadows lurked in various parts. We regretted having forgotten an electric torch. There were probably

several hidden passages. No telling where they might lead.

Allan and the doctor started off in one direction, I in another. One black shadow, at least, was a corridor. I found it, entered, and groped cautiously into absolute dark. There came a slight twist, and an abrupt slope downward. So steep was the floor that I was obliged to sit and slide, feet foremost—I wondered where. At any rate, the temperature was rising; and so rapid was the rise that I felt as if I had jumped suddenly into a steam room and slammed the door. I shot a glance behind where, by a dim light emanating from the main cavern, a thin white vapour curled and rose. This "blow hole" I realized, was not necessarily a part of ancient history; and naturally I felt that it had been waiting for just such a time as this to start rumbling its in'ards, melt its floors and burst into fire. But I slid on until my feet encountered broken lava. The heat here was almost stifling. I rose, groped about the walls; and, somewhat to my relief, discovered that I could go no farther. A cave-in blocked the way; and I lost little time getting back to the cool air of the open chamber.

I called Allan and Arch, but received no answer. Probably they were making like discoveries in some other direction; and I headed for the blackness at a far corner, testing the floor before every step, and fumbling the rocky walls. Ah, here was another passage; but before I could enter, the sound of laughter came from somewhere overhead. Allan and Arch were peering down.

"You must have gone up that rope in a terrible hurry," I remarked.

They laughed again.



THE CAVERN. SOCORRO ISLAND

"Take the first aisle to your right," directed Allan, "and you won't need the line."

I found the "aisle" referred to, and groped again into blackness. It was a long winding tunnel leading on a gentle incline upward. Water dripped constantly, and the temperature was the same as that of the main chamber. I came upon something that rattled like bones. I struck a match. Bones they were, forming the dilapidated skeleton of a curly-horned ram. The match extinguished, darkness gave way at last to a dim glow; and, after another twist, I emerged upon a tangle of banyan roots at the foot of the lava ridge. Evidently there had been a cave-in here; and, if this were so, there would be a continuation of the tunnel not far away. I found it, following the passage to its sudden end. It was a steep, downward slope of perhaps twenty feet, then a blockade. For a Turkish bath, this place excelled the other. The heat, though not accompanied by any visible vapour, was all but unbearable; but there was much water here. The walls sparkled with a million glittering beads of it; and, until I passed my hand over them, I wondered if I were not discovering some remarkable kind of diamond mine. At any rate, here was sufficient fresh water to supply the needs of a thirsty man; and there was some satisfaction in the find.

CHAPTER VII

“ TREASURE ISLAND ”

NORTH-BOUND from Manzanillo, we sighted turtles—two on the first occasion, very close together. There had been reports of another vessel, recently cruising in the vicinity, that had passed through an area so infested by them that her progress had been impeded, the surface of the ocean, as far as the eye could see, having been literally paved or cobbled with their huge shells! As to the accuracy of this story, there may be room for well-grounded doubts; but we had travelled much since leaving the Revilla Gigedo Islands, and were fast learning that Mexican waters offered an excellent remedy for scepticitis. Not that we came upon these shell-backed monsters in any such numbers; but those that we saw—five all told—were enough not only to impede our progress, but to stop us completely: the anticipation of turtle steak, rather than the physical resistance being, in our case, to blame.

Arch and I, for reasons unknown, manned the skiff. Neither of us could have professed experience in turtle-catching. We knew only that, in shallow water, they were often harpooned; that, on the beaches, they were sometimes shot; and that, caught napping on the high seas, an effective method of capture lay in capsizing them, or simply in seizing the creatures suddenly by the hind flippers, and, if not too heavy, dragging them aboard.

But for us, when it came to the practice, theory went

sadly by the boards. Our turtles lay so close together that we conceived it a shame to lose either of them; yet the commotion raised by one would be enough to send the other to Davy Jones unless the taking were simultaneous, and for this, as we realised too late, an extra man was needed. It was more than likely, however, that he, as well as everyone else aboard the yacht, was with us—heart and soul. The yells were enough to arouse little fishes two thousand leagues under the sea.

“ Keep astern of ’em ! ” “ Head ’em off ! ” “ Lay ’longside ! ” “ Stern first ! ” “ Head first ! ” “ Harpoon ’em ! ” “ Lasso ’em ! ” “ Grab ’em ! ” “ Lay hold the side flippers ! ” “ Stern flippers ! ” “ Fore flippers ! ” “ Head ! ” “ Neck ! ” “ A weather eye, there ! They’ll nip y’r hand off ! ” “ Hind—*hind* flips ! ” “ Tail ! ”

The turtles remained in a blissful state of dreams. Arch, at the sweeps, pulled closer. He attempted it stern first, then broadside-on, then head on; while I, leaping here and there like a Jumping-Jack, tumbled at last on to the fore thwart for definite action.

I seized a boat-hook ! Put it down. A gaff-hook ! Put it down. A harpoon ! Put it down ! A rifle ! Put it down. We were well-equipped. Every man aboard the *Velero* had materialized his theory of turtle-catching in this small boat; and now probably the most brilliant idea of all was materializing in my own hands : a running bowline on the free end of the painter ! It is remarkable to what an unlimited extent instinct will serve a man !

Quick—quick as a flash I slipped a noose over one turtle’s head. So much for him. And quick, even quicker than another flash, I lunged for the second;

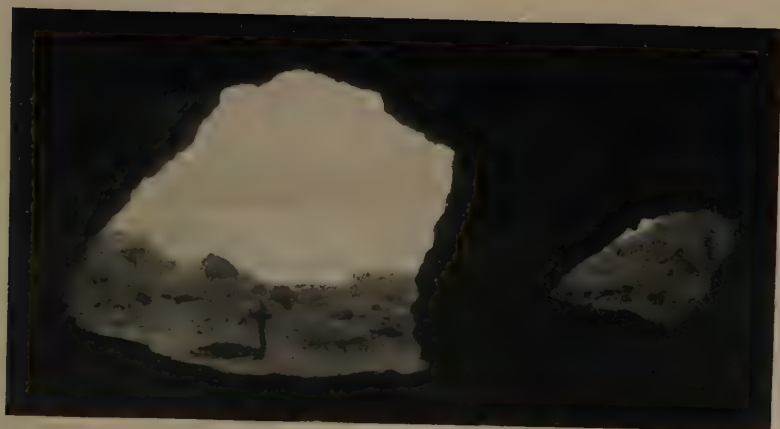
and I had him. True, I was head and shoulders under water, bent like a jack-knife over the gunwale, and slowly drowning; but I clung to him with that resolute intrepidity that is more ominous to these armoured reptiles of the deep than the savage prick of a harpoon. Desperately he fought; but I had him, and whether by the fore, main, or mizzen flipper, I didn't care. I had him.

Now the doctor was coming to lend a hand. He stepped on my back, kicked my shins, drove his knee into my ribs and sprawled over me. The boat was shipping one green sea after another. What the devil was Arch doing, anyhow? What was wrong? My arms were growing numb; my legs were growing numb; my head had been numb for some time. Despite my scissor-grip on a thwart, the monster was dragging me farther and farther from the skiff. My yells were bubbles that drifted away; and Arch's, had I only known it, were the same. I surrendered. He had done likewise. We sat staring at each other, too exhausted to vent our opinions on the other's folly. The condemned turtles were gone.

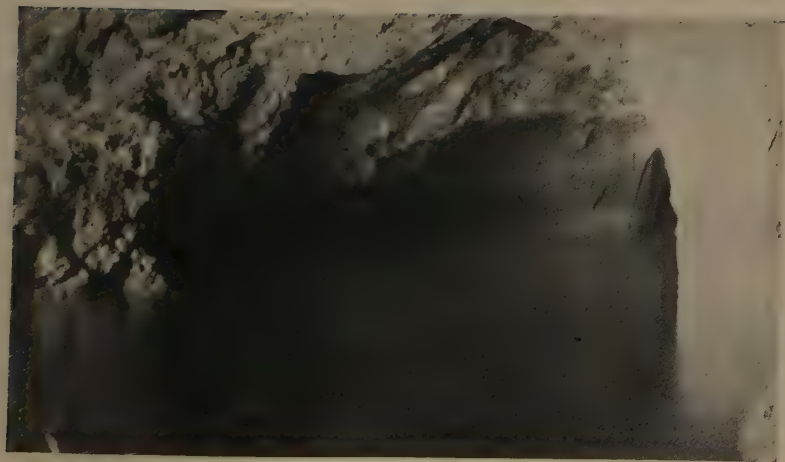
I shall not attempt to quote the resounding imprecations issued from the yacht's company at that moment. Every last man of them knew just how turtles should be caught; and we, in our thoughtless haste, had shoved off without them. Why, in the name of all that's good, hadn't we done as we were told? The doctor shrugged, flouncing himself into the stern sheets while I paddled toward an oar that was drifting away.

"Arch," I asked at last, "what was the idea of bothering with the turtle made fast to the painter? Didn't I put a good noose around its neck?"

"A splendid one," grinned the doctor. "It would



A "FIRST-FLOOR" CAVE



A "GROUND-FLOOR" CAVE

LAS TRES MARIETAS ISLANDS

have held a whale. But turtles have a way of drawing in their heads. The noose was where you put it; but the head wasn't."

Thus we returned from the battle, I in a disgrace well earned. But then, this was Turtle Day on the high seas. We sighted another that disappeared before we could get the boat over; then two more—these offering exactly the same possibilities of capture as the former pair. Launching the skiff, this time Captain T—— took charge. The results—turtle soup that evening.

Drawing close, he seized one by the after flippers, turned it immediately over to Arch and me while he laid hold of the second. Then there was a tugging, splashing, swearing and general confusion while the gunwale bore down and the waves swashed over. Captain T—— hung on. Arch and I hung on; but our prize, with only its fore flippers submerged, proved a match. Before we could ship it, the other had broken away from the captain; and, thanks only to this, re-enforcement was afforded the doctor and me. One large turtle occupied the after-half of the skiff when we returned to the *Velero*.

Rounding Cape Corrientes with plans to find anchorage for the night in Banderas Bay, we were nearing Las Tres Marietas, a group of small islands, rocks and shoals distributed sparsely through a narrow area about five miles in length, and extending seaward from a channel off Punta Mita at the northern side of the bay. Besides a great white rock, lying about eight miles off the point, there were two small islands close in, the lesser one resembling, from our angle of approach, a sugar-topped, two-layer cake with the upper part half-gone and its remainder eaten by rats. It was practically hollow, being tunnelled and caved until nothing

was left but the shell. We became interested, especially when George pointed to a thin column of smoke issuing from one of the larger caverns.

"It might be a volcano," he suggested.

"The pilot book doesn't say so," returned the skipper.

It was recalled, however, that the same book had not mentioned the steaming "blow hole" which we had discovered on Socorro Island. If this were no volcano, what was it? There were no fishing boats or vessels of any description in sight. Perhaps this smoke was a signal from shipwrecked sailors.

"It's late," said the skipper; "and we've got to find anchorage in Banderas before dark. Time enough in the morning to pick up your shipwrecked sailors."

That was how we happened to visit "The Isle of Caves." We gave it this name, since it had no other. Arch pointed out the probability that it was composed of very soft sandstone; that the upper layer, after having been exposed to the sea and drilled, tunnelled and half destroyed by the waves, had been shoved up by volcanic action so that now there were apparently two layers. Obviously the lower one was comparatively new. It contained few caves, and these generally quite shallow.

As we drew near, no smoke was visible; but, nosing in close to the reefs just after sunrise, we perceived the source of it. There were two small sloops lying snug behind the rocks; and, from a neighbouring beach, six, dark, brawny Mexicans stood staring at us.

Arch suggested that if these were fishermen, all well and good; but if not, it was likely that the nature of their business would make us unwelcome. Better to take some precautions, at all events; and, before climbing into the skiff, he strapped a very formidable

“ precaution ” in the shape of a “ Montana Howitzer ” about his waist. Because of the yacht’s proximity to the reef, Allan and Captain T—— remained aboard. As for Joe and George, breakfast held too great an appeal. Consequently the doctor and I, together with the two seamen, Bill and Perry, comprised the landing party.

We made way through a narrow passage in the reef with a heavy surf booming on either side; and headed for a small beach that promised a safe landing. We had met the devil ray once before; and now we met him again in rather close quarters.

Science gives him the name of “ manta ”; tells us he eats *probably* nothing but shellfish, and intimates that his ferocity is greatly overestimated. Fishermen call him “ sea devil ”; tell us he is a man-eater; intimate that they would rather associate with a giant octopus or a shark than with this monster, whose weight sometimes goes by the ton, whose twenty-foot wing-spread is sufficient to envelop a diver, and whose mouth is strong enough to munch his head off!

On meeting the creature as we did, we were inclined, if there were doubts about its nature, to give the fishermen the benefit of them. To us it looked more like an ordinary bat-winged devil, and not a “ manta ” or anything of the sort. Nor did it seem to us that four men in a skiff held any resemblance to *shellfish*, as, by the actions of this monster, the scientific theory might have led us to believe. Not to sprinkle flowers, the damned thing was after us; and, without stopping to pick them, we rowed like hell.

That wasn’t fast enough. A black fin—it must have been seven feet high—broke surface off our port quarter, while the monster, moving like the devil

that he was, banked his turn, described an abrupt arc off our beam and cut directly across our bow, heading us away from the surf. Bill and Perry backed water for their lives, then gave way in another direction while the doctor's "Montana Howitzer" peeped up over the transom and jabbered some of the King's best English. The sea devil didn't understand it. Pearl oysters and cockles didn't speak that way. However, I believe that, although the bullets caused only a slight itching, the creature recognized its mistake, because we never saw it again. Perhaps, after all, it had been a case only of a little curiosity on the ray's part; but it was easier to regard it as such after we were safely ashore. The thing, shaped like a gigantic bat with long rat-tail behind, being nearly twice as broad as our skiff was long, and being capable of springing many feet into the air, failed at the time to give us any sense of security. Science, as Joe told the doctor once, is all right in its way, but often it doesn't weigh very much. A devil ray, for instance, has a few tons to back it, while a "manta" has only the paper it is printed on, and very little of that.

On landing we lost sight of the Mexicans, and, climbing to the island's second story, lost sight of one another. At length, however, I met Perry, emerging from behind a clump of cactus and sage. He had seen Bill and the doctor, he told me. They were talking to the Mexicans and seemed on friendly terms. So the two of us, chin-deep in brush, pushed on to the caves.

There were several large entrances, but most of them were blocked with rather tall and almost impenetrable cactus. The first accessible opening that we were able to find was a hole, large enough to climb

through and no more. Inside was absolute darkness; and, as our custom had been on similar occasions in the past, we had forgotten the electric torch. Inside, therefore, we began to grope about in utter blackness. It was :

“ Perry ! ” “ Yes, sir ! ” “ Where are you ? ”
 “ Here ! Good Lord ! ” “ What’s the matter ? ”
 “ Bumped m’head ! ” “ Come this way. All clear.”
 “ Feel anything ? ” “ No.” “ Big room, this. Hear the echo ! ” Then a grunt, and a volley of imprecations. “ What’s wrong ? ” “ Tripped on a pile of dirt. Blowed if somebody hasn’t been digging here. Got a match ? ”

Having few we used them sparingly. We were in an extensive high-ceilinged chamber with apparently several off-shooting passages or deep-shadowed crevices in the rocky walls. We took a hasty bearing on one, then glanced about at the floor. Perry was right. There had been digging in here. There were half-a-dozen shallow pits with earth piled up alongside. Evidently the men we had seen on the beach were looking for treasure.

During the civil strife in Mexico, the banks, if they existed at all, were not the most stable things in the world. Consequently many of the country’s inhabitants resorted to primitive methods of security. Valuables of all kinds were put away beneath the surface of the ground; and if, through death, the owner followed them, the secret was often buried with his bones. There are probably more clues pointing to hidden treasure in Mexico than there are people who can afford to heed them; and, toward our “ Isle of Caves,” one clue perhaps had pointed. In every chamber—and we passed through many—were shallow pits with dirt heaped up beside them.

For romance of the old beloved type—a ship, an island, a cave and buried gold—here was a perfect setting; and, groping with outstretched arms through black tunnels, I could almost hear the thump of a wooden leg and a distant echo piping up the eternal: “*Fifteen men on a dead man’s chest—Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!*” And then the shrill voice in the darkness: “*Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!*”

There were several large caverns where light, entering at opposite sides through openings of fantastic shape and varied sizes brought out vivid colours. The floors were carpeted with a velvety orange dust. The walls were mustard yellow, green and strawberry red—one blending through intermediate shades to the other, and the whole merging into brighter hues above. The ceilings were hung with tiny stalactitical appendages, coral-like and delicate of texture. Almost every insignificant crevice we discovered to be a corridor leading to another large chamber; and it was while groping through one of these narrow recesses that we heard voices.

I stopped. Perry encountered me from the rear. We had passed an abrupt turn, and, there being not the faintest suggestion of light, evidently there was another ahead.

“Do you hear that?” I whispered, thinking of the Mexicans we had seen on the beach.

“Think it’s the doctor,” replied the sailor.

It was the doctor. I recognized the voice; but it was the tone of it now that worried us.

“You will, will you?” we heard him say. “I’ll just about blow your ugly head off!”

And then another voice, a rasping whisper: “Quick! Fill ’im up with lead. Kill ’im!”

By that time Perry and I had sprung forward

through the dark. We bumped the walls, stumbled, struck a blind alley, turned, groped in another direction, lost all track of each other, met again in half a panic until, at last, crawling on hands and knees, we emerged into a huge dimly lighted cavern. But at that instant it was as if a battery of twelve fourteen-inch guns had opened upon us. It was as if I had been picked up, whirled about three times and set down again.

Whether I was giddy or not, I hardly knew. At any rate, I saw the tail of a huge snake whip out from a shadow and disappear. I was feebly aware of another explosion, then found myself staring again at a crevice. Bill stood by, poking into it with a long stick. The doctor's "Montana Howitzer" had been arguing this time with a boa constrictor.

"Only a baby," observed Arch, dragging the thing out by the tail and into the cave.

It was about seven feet long. The parents were probably three times that, but we did not look for them. The doctor took the skin with him to the skiff. Allan was already tooting his whistle, anxious to put out. We saw him waving good-bye to several native dugouts which we passed later. The crews were more than happy. They had been presented with several packages of American tobacco, and their smiles were from ear to ear. Arch, who had already spoken to them, explained that they professed to be fishermen, and they lived in one of the caves on the island's first floor.

"*Adiós amigos!*" they cried.

We returned the farewell and pulled for the yacht. We were to make Isabel Island before dark.

CHAPTER VIII

DEEP-SEA BIRDS

ISABEL ISLAND, comprising two round-topped hills joined by a low isthmus, had the appearance of a half-submerged dumb-bell, the lower portion completed by reflection. Although it lies only about eighteen miles from the mainland, it remains uninhabited and is seldom visited even by fishermen. Coming to anchor just before sunset, however, we noticed, in the shadow of rocks, several little ragamuffin sloops, and saw, putting off from these and from neighbouring shores, a half dozen or more native dugouts. Swarms of sea birds soared and dived about us. There were terns, frigates, petrels, boatswain birds, gulls, pelicans and rock pigeons by the tens of thousands. The land fairly scintillated with fluttering wings, bobbing white breasts, and shooting bodies that glided helter-skelter, alighted and rose again. We were impatient to land, but the sun was low and there were the canoemen to receive.

Several of the dugouts shipped their paddles to drift at a distance while one, in the lead, proceeded alongside. Joe, our interpreter, greeted the dark-faced crew and held forth at some length in Spanish. The Mexicans, we learned, were after pearls, tortoiseshell and livers of sharks! Of the sharks they had caught several hundred. By boiling the livers they extracted the oil which, they said, sold at three



ON LAS TRES MARIETAS ISLANDS



pesos for five gallons, and made excellent "cod-liver oil!"

That evening the petrels, being nocturnal of habit, invaded us in large squeaking squadrons. They skimmed, like darting shadows, over the surface of the sea. They swerved up, rebounded from our awnings, flew under them, over them, beat upon the planking.

The petrel, whose name, derived from the Latin, may be translated, "Little Peter," received the appellation because of the belief that the Apostle Peter once walked on the water. Indeed, this bird is so light as to be able to keep his paddling feet just touching the surface, and, although his wings are spread, he often gives the appearance of strutting along over the waves. He is strictly seagoing and seldom seen, save during nesting season, within sight of land. His power of flight rivals that of the albatross.

We were afforded a very close view of him that night. Because of the warm weather it happened that I slept on deck; and it happened, too, that I was awakened very rudely. There was a frightful flapping of wings over my head. I reached for the light and saw, swaggering along by my mattress, a trim little gentleman, wearing a black domino mask, a puffed-out white shirt and a glossy evening jacket that was thrown back rakishly in the manner of one, who, somewhat ill at ease, is unable to find a better place for his hands and has thrust them deeply into his pockets.

Arch would want to see this one; so, by tossing a blanket suddenly over him, he was my captive. As I carried him down to the main saloon he issued a loud succession of vibrant screeches; and, although Arch had turned in, he was aroused and brought forth in short order. I had had every intention of freeing the

bird; but now the doctor's admiration for it, prompted by the cold spur of science, claimed the specimen.

"It'll be like going to sleep," said Arch. And, producing a can of ether, he saturated a handkerchief. The bird inhaled the fumes with scarcely a flutter, then, at last, as I imagined it, went buzzing off into that tangle of eternity that comes like the roll of a terrible drum, merges into the intolerable and goes blaring on to nothingness.

The doctor removed the anæsthetic, and gazed down with obvious regret at the sleeping beauty. Neither of us spoke for a moment. Men are unreasonable things more often than not.

"Did you ever see such vivid markings?" exclaimed Arch at last, stroking the glossy plumage of black and white. "A thing like that must enjoy life." He paused, then: "What do you say if we bring him to?"

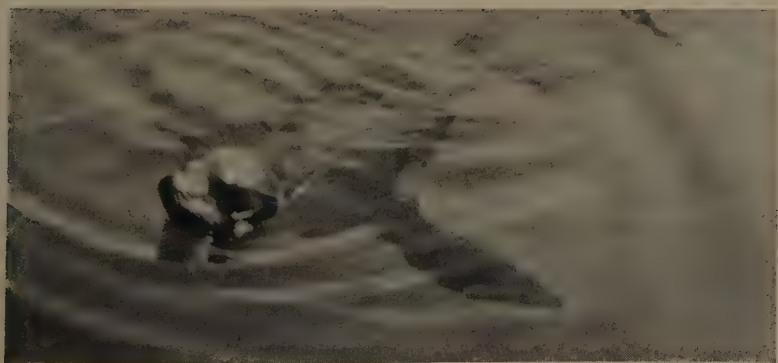
I nodded. We carried Mr. Petrel to the deck; and, in the course of a short time, he was staggering about like a good fellow. We left him to recuperate; but I was a witness, early in the morning, to his flying away with a tale of adventure that few birds could hope to understand.

Shortly after breakfast, we visited the petrels' nesting grounds. Apart from other birds, they had chosen the grassy area where we found it impossible to walk without trampling nests. The hill was dotted white with their white breasts. Upon arousing the birds, they swooped up in clouds, but hovered close, and no amount of commotion could drive them farther.

The terns, or noddies, differing from the Clarion Island variety in that their legs were a brilliant sky-blue, instead of yellow, and their plumage, rather than white, a dusky black and brown, occupied another



TERN ON ISABEL ISLAND



A SEA-LION

sector. They made no attempt at nest-building, but tended their eggs or broods wherever chance had put them. They fringed the sand or rocky shores, or hobnobbed together in the outskirts of the frigate bird's native woods. Some remained by their young no matter how close we came, others reluctantly took to wing but returned immediately upon our departure.

Most terns have forked tails, like those of the boat-swains or frigates, this common feature being often misused to distinguish the tern from the gull proper. This variety, as well as that of Clarion Island, however, had wedge tails, yet differed from any ordinary gull by the absence of ridge along the upper mandible, and also the lack of any decided curve at the tip—these features being the only true means of differentiation.

The ugly black frigates, or men-o'-war birds, we discovered nesting among the branches of a scrub-tree area that extended from the sand beach up the mountain to a salt crater lake where huge lizards, iguanas, several feet long, lay snoozing in the bright sun. Why the frigates had chosen such a place we could not imagine. Their feather-draped skeletons bestrewed the ground and dangled everywhere from the branches. For each frigate living we could count another dead; and the remains hung as often as not within a foot or so of inhabited nests. We could not blame them for shuddering and chattering their bills. They were living in a morgue.

Besides those dead, many were dying; and there was an obvious reason. When once they dropped below the tangle of branches, they could not rise again; and often they trapped themselves in a hopeless clutter before getting that far.

In the nests, male as well as female saw to the duties of incubation. Both sexes were jet black, save that the blustering sires carried a bright scarlet throat pouch, which, from a mere wrinkly streak of red, he could inflate into a balloon half the size of his body. Of this mysterious object, he appeared quite proud; but, in order to satisfy his vanity, it seemed that he had to expand the thing just a trifle more than those of his neighbouring competitors. Mrs. Frigate, squatting leisurely upon her scrappy nest, chattered her long hooked bill and urged him on.

Frigates almost attain the size of buzzards. Their tails are deeply forked, their wings long and narrow and their feet sparsely webbed. As fishermen, they are first-class pirates.

We saw a gull, with a small fish in its beak, evidently attempting to gain its nest. Soaring above was a man-o'-war. Disinclined to come close to the water, it made several threatening dives at the smaller bird, so that the latter dared fly not more than ten yards at a time. At length, however, after avoiding several swoops of the buccaneer, it flew once too often and once too high. Down came the frigate, swift and straight as an arrow. In terror the gull discharged its cargo, swerved aside while the black-winged pirate snatched the fish from the air and flapped off to the woods.

The boatswain or tropic birds are likewise brigands, but brigands of nobler birth. Like the albatross, they have aroused a superstition among sailors that they are the winged spirits of mariners; but, considering their piratical tendencies together with their rich attire, they might better be regarded as the spirits of gentlemen buccaneers, such as Sir Francis Drake.



PETRELS



TERN IN THE FRIGATE-BIRDS' WOOD

ISABEL ISLAND

Their plumage varies in colour with the several species; but, whether pink, white, or black, of all pelagic winged things they are the birds of paradise. There is always the characteristic satin-like gloss, and generally the two long trailing feathers extending perhaps a yard behind the fringing swallow tail. They, too, are strictly of the deep blue waters, capable of flying, with quick determined strokes and with never a pause to sail, for hundreds of miles. Exhausted, sometimes they alight upon the spars of a vessel—in order, according to superstition, to carry away another soul of a mariner.

A pirate was never at home on shore, unless in a cave; and thus we found the boatswains on Isabel Island. We discovered them in the cool shade of a great cavern where breakers came clattering in among the pebbles, turning silver pools into froth and striking a rainbow in the spray. Like the man-o'-war, Sir Bo'sun must assume half the domestic cares. We noticed this first when her ladyship, upon our approach, emitted a horrible scream of terror which echoed to and from the rocky walls with the sound of a spike being uprooted from a log of oak. In a panic she sought the protection of his lordship, attempting to wedge herself behind. He scolded her, viciously pecked her, then, at last, agreed to "compromise" by granting her wish. This does not mean that her ladyship is a coward. Alone on her nest, she will die before abandoning her duty.

Their bills, gently curved, were of a bright coral red, their breasts snow-white and their double-plume trailers as delicate almost as the precious feathers of aigrettes. Their beauty, however, was no deeper than their plumage; and if songs are born of the soul,

then their immortal spirits were only so much calamity. Superstitions regarding them should be changed. No common seaman was ever quite so bad. The boat-swain is not the salty soul of a sailor, but that of a gentleman buccaneer, hanged for his crimes and damned to live eternally as a self-contradiction.

For the study of seabirds we found no better place than Isabel Island. But our schedule pressed us on and the gliding squadrons of petrels escorted us out at twilight.

CHAPTER IX

“ THE ISLE OF INCENDIARIES ”

WHEN meeting the fishermen of Isabel Island, we had been slightly concerned in regard to their presence. They had outnumbered us ; and we were within sight of the group, Las Tres Marias—not to be confused with the lesser islands, quite similar in name and mentioned in a former chapter—which offered positive reason for precaution. We had been warned ; and it was not the sort of warning that comes from the calamity ballyhoo who claims to know Mexico because he has been there. It came from a well-educated Mexican who had favoured us with data based not only upon his broad knowledge of the country, but also upon his personal correspondence with Government officials scattered along the west coast and inland as far as Guadalajara. He happened not to mention Isabel, but in regard to Las Tres Marias which include the island of Maria Madre, a Mexican prison settlement, he cautioned us not to attempt anchorage in those waters.

“ From time to time,” he said, “ American vessels have been set afire right there, presumably by natives visiting the ships towards evening, then sneaking down the hatches to reconnoitre their chances. During the night, the boats were destroyed. Most unsatisfactory red-tape with Tepic.”

With all due regard to the note, however, we had visited these islands. We had travelled extensively

along the west coast of the mainland; we had gone many miles inland through the so-called bandit country, and we had yet to experience any traits of the Mexican people so radically different from our own as to cause suspicion. Indeed, from the primitive-minded Indian to the light-skinned aristocrat of pure Castilian blood, we had been met everywhere by an attitude of welcome and a spirit of hospitality that I have witnessed nowhere else in the world.

It was this spirit that had met us in San Blas. It had taken the form of two Customs officials, who, at our request, announced their willingness to accompany us to the islands. There they had introduced us to a similar spirit—this seeming to pervade everyone we met from the governor, or warden, of the prison settlement, to his criminal charges; and it was difficult to believe, although we remained overnight with no watch on deck, that there was any cause for alarm.

Regarding our experiences there, my personal log gives the following account:

“ . . . The group, lying roughly about sixty miles from historic San Blas, comprises the mountainous islands of Cleopha, Magdalena and Maria Madre, ranging respectively about three, eight and eleven miles in length. They are volcanic of origin, and thickly wooded of nature. As early as 1532 they were known to the Spanish navigators and used extensively by the buccaneers, especially the French, that scoured the coast.

“ Our course was laid to Magdalena; but there we found the sea too rough to attempt landing through the breakers, and moved on to the prison settlement of Maria Madre. Here, despite the peaceful surroundings of green and brown, with the lazy surf



TERN AND YOUNG. ISOBEL ISLAND

before and the blue sea beyond, we were disappointed. Accustomed to the picturesque setting of dreamy San Blas with her low thatched huts shaded by cocoa palms or half hid in the feathery shrubs of acacia, we were dazzled by a glare of white barn-like structures, built of wood and corrugated iron with lettering, evidently intended to catch the eye of the mainlander, painted across the slant roofs. There was a certain stiffness and immaculate severity, like a slaughter-house on the eve of governmental inspection. There were, however, several old buildings of adobe and tile : these, as our friends from San Blas explained, being all that remained of the original settlement, most of the place having been destroyed during the revolution.

“ Landing, we found ourselves walking a gauntlet of eyes. They flashed before us, then fell aside into the ranks of white-clad tatterdemalions, prisoners and victims of petty crime. Each one carried a plaything. Some had been carving figures on pearl shells, and some had been stringing beads or making watch-fobs of leather and mother-of-pearl. Two of them carried small chortling parrots ; and twined about the neck of another was a wriggling young boa constrictor.

“ We attempted to hide our interest. There seems always to be a sense of embarrassment that resembles shame when one is brought face to face with fellow creatures of circumstance less fortunate than one’s own. But the governor, or warden, stepping from one of the smaller buildings, relieved the pressure. By a brusque wave of his large hand, as if prisoners and mosquitoes annoyed him, he dispersed the crowd and discharged a husky welcome through his black, bristling moustache.

“ After a short conference with our San Blas friends, he agreed to show us the settlement. Most of the

prisoners, he said, were allowed, save during working hours, to roam as they pleased. Many, as we noticed, spoke fair English, which fact was remarkable, since hitherto we had found few peons versed in any other language but their own. We mentioned it to the governor.

“ ‘Oh!’ he exclaimed with a frown that turned into a wide grin, ‘these men, you understand, are here only for the lesser crimes; and, in Mexico, it’s a difficult thing for a man to make a living at that trade. It requires good training, and for this they have to go to your country. Generally they came back. When they do, we catch them!’

“We joined him in the laugh he expected; but learned shortly that there was more truth than humour in his theory.

“ ‘Take it from me,’ said one of the prisoners, ‘this place ain’t half bad ’longside them lock-ups in your country.’

“Probably the man was right. Here were unlimited opportunities for fishing and hunting; and the swimming alone should have been solace enough. Such sports, however—swimming especially—hold little appeal for the peon.

“We were shown the prisoners’ sleeping quarters— a large, clean and airy barrack-room, but it contained not one stick of furniture, not a single bed.

“ ‘*Bed!*’ exclaimed the governor in answer to our inquiry. ‘A large shipment came in recently, but what do *they* want with *beds*? They’ve never used one before, and they don’t care to be forced to it now. The floor, and what clothes they have on, are enough.’

“All told, there were two hundred prisoners, the duration of their term-sentences being a matter left to the governor’s discretion. Much depended, he said,



THE SETTLEMENT



SOME OF THE OLDER BUILDINGS

MARIA MADRE ISLAND

on good behaviour. I did not ask, as I was tempted to do, what might be his attitude towards a well-behaved prisoner who chanced to be a good cook !

“ Although a vessel with sundry supplies called at the island once a month, the settlement was practically self-supporting, there being about a hundred employees to supervise prison labour. There were mills, carpenter shops, machine shops, bakeries, laundry, salt works, orchards, agricultural plots, a hospital, a school and, in fact, everything suited to the modest needs of the community. The mountains were covered with nearly every variety of hardwood. This supplied lumber for houses and furniture. In the near future they were to build a large ship. Its timber would be of wood from island forests; cut, seasoned and shaped by prison labour. Even in the case of certain rigging, hemp was to be raised, spun and twisted into rope there in the settlement.

“ *Tortillas*, as universal in Mexico as rice in China, were served at noon in front of the kitchen. The men consumed them in large quantities; but evidently there were always more than enough. Wild cattle, with which the unfenced hills abounded, had discovered this. We saw several of them ambling down into the camp where they accepted alms and shared the midday siesta. It was a case of voluntary domestication prompted by the sweet odour of *tortillas*. Imagine a cow eating flapjacks ! ”

So much for “ The Isle of Incendiaries.” We had anchored there; and we had not been set afire. If one seeks it, trouble is easily found in any country—especially in Mexico, the citizens of which, being naturally accommodating, would not have the trouble-hunting foreigner return home disappointed.

CHAPTER X

A WIND TRAP

THE Gulf of California, as seen upon the world map, is very apt to convey the impression of a mere strip of water, like a lagoon perhaps, across which anyone standing on the beach at Mazatlan can gaze at the palms of La Paz or the cactus of San Lucas. Upon second thought, of course, none would be guilty of the notion any more than of the idea that to stand upon the roof of a New York skyscraper might enable one to watch the street-car traffic of Washington D.C., or the automobiles of Boston.

If compared with the ocean, no doubt the gulf is small; but it is, nevertheless, a part of that ocean, and lacks few of its attributes. There are currents, tides, and heavy seas. And there are winds—winds comparable to typhoons off the China coast. For instance, there are certain hurricanes, known to the natives as *Los Cordonazos*, which occur usually in the month of October. Usually they are of short duration, but are so violent and accompanied by such tremendous seas that, according to reference quoted by the navy department, “nothing can withstand them.” Nor are these the only winds to be taken seriously by the navigator. One may expect to encounter at any time a stiff north-wester capable of attaining the velocity of a full gale.

Our cruising in these waters was not extensive, but of all the adventure that lurks there we received



A BO'SUN BIRD

our fair portion. Contrary to our original plans, we did not visit the Isle of Tiburon, where a primitive tribe of Indians, generally believed hostile, continues to use the bow and arrow and subsists chiefly upon raw meat. Allan, who had explored the place several years before, considered our time too precious to warrant the long voyage northward. Consequently we made Carmen Island, one-third of the way up the gulf, our turning point.

Carmen, a rather low range of volcanic mountains and mesa land within paddling distance of Lower California's east shores, had aroused our interest because of its phenomenal salt lagoon. The lake, with dimensions roughly of a mile and a half by a mile, being swept by the winds and warmed by the tropical sun, is subjected to a rapid evaporation by which salt is precipitated in such quantities that the amount taken away in one week is reproduced in the next. The supply is said to be inexhaustible and of such remarkable quality that, with no purification whatever, it may be sold as the finest table salt. The lagoon has no visible communication with the sea, yet its waters are known to rise and fall, although somewhat sluggishly, with the tide, this being attributed to a rapid seepage under the narrow strip of shingle beach which separates the salt lake from the waters of the gulf. During our visit the accumulation had risen to such an elevation that the influx from the sea did not occur until ordinary high tide.

"Dig down as far as you like," the plant manager had told us, "and you will find, save for thin crusts of silt between layers, nothing but salt. It has been deposited through the ages. There is no known end to it."

After spending the better part of two days going over the land and tramping inland through the wild and sparsely wooded mountains, we cruised southward for Cape San Lucas, planning to visit any bay or island that might most intrigue our curiosity. As a favourable point of call we decided upon San Jose Island and drew up in eighteen fathoms at the southwestern end under a low spit that extended a mile or so from the main body of the island. The day was bright and calm, and there was only the pebbly babble of waves along the shores to relieve an almost oppressive quietude. Silver-grey was a sleeping stretch of lagoon—unrippled, save by the occasional flights of snub-tailed ducks; non-reflective, save of the midday heat that seemed to rise, concentrate itself and, with reinforcements from the cove, focus down upon the hot shimmering decks of the *Velero*. It was hedged about with the mangroves' waxy green, all a-clutter with white ibis and snowy aigrettes. Beyond were low hills, their shallow arroyos bristling with giant cacti, and blurred, in the manner of a weird double exposure, by a watery mirage. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the colourful mountains of the peninsula rose up from a sea of vermilion glass.

They are strange waters, those of the gulf, as apt to be red as blue; and, indeed, to the early explorers from Spain, were known as the "Vermilion Sea." Cruising there, one is apt to encounter extensive patches of red, a phenomenon assigned to countless tiny organisms either suspended below or drifting upon the surface of the waves.

And they are live waters too. Not to mention the violence of winds and seas, they are brimful of almost every species of fish known to the waters of the entire



THE SALT LAKE



HEAPS OF SALT

CARMEN ISLAND

world. "Their numbers are not only incredible," says J. Ross Browne, as quoted by a federal bureau, "but many of them are of extraordinary beauty and brilliancy of colour." Of the monster species, "sword-fish of immense size" are mentioned as having "been known to attack vessels and leave their swords in the timbers." And mentioned also is science's much-maligned friend, the *manta raya*, or sea devil, called here in the mariner's most reliable source of information "the terror of the pearl divers" and spoken of as being "an immense brute of enormous strength, cunning and ferocity." (Grant him that at least.) And "another inhabitant of these waters," I read, "is the octopus," often "found in rocky cavities along the shore . . . its arms ten to twenty feet in length," by which "it seizes, envelops and smothers its prey, which it afterwards devours at its leisure." . . . And then, of course, sharks. Here they are called *tiburones*, are said to be "very ferocious," "to be as large as medium-sized California whales, to weigh over a thousand pounds and to reach a length of thirty feet."

We saw none quite so large; nor were we looking for them. But, in San Josef's deep lagoon, as we discovered during our walk ashore, they came in numbers and sizes sufficient to make dry land more welcome than small boats. I once heard of an immense shark attacking a fishing launch, leaving tooth marks, as satisfactory evidence for the sceptic, on either side of the keel! I do not vouch for this, nor did I ask to see the evidence. My boyhood and youth, being spent among boatmen, fishermen and anglers—anglers in some instances of national reputation—I knew whom to trust; and very often, as in this instance, I believed. Go then, if you smile, into Mexican waters;

return then, if you wish, with whatever yarns you can spin. I, for one, would be your sympathetic listener, and give you credit for more than imagination.

At San Josef, however, we were not annoyed by visible monsters. The day was so warm, the sea so alluring that we plunged in from the *Velero* and swam despite them. But there was another kind of a monster lurking somewhere to the north-westward. The glass in the wheelhouse announced him by its steady fall. Allan remarked of it casually. Captain T—— doubled our ground tackle and ordered more scope on the chains. Then we turned in—all hands, and forgot.

I must have drifted off somewhere into the seventh heaven where All Hades could not trouble my bliss; for it was at the termination of the mid-watch that All Hades began letting off steam. Half the ship was aroused, but it was all the same to me. I was not awakened until daylight when, slantwise through my portlight, a sunshaft came, and slantwise from another direction a hoary crest plopped in, slapped me smartly across the face and drenched me to the skin. A roar of breakers, thundering over the spit, sounded so close that I thought myself tumbled amidst them. Kicking off a wet tangle of bed-clothes, I struggled for the surface, but was slapped in the face by another sea; and the low siren call of a rising wind that seemed to vibrate through every timber of the vessel brought the realization of facts. Slamming-to the port, I gazed out where combers marched by in fiesta. They flaunted their gay crests at the sun. They hissed and clapped to the fanfare of winds. They tossed papery flakes and covered themselves in a shower of white.

Jumping into some scanty togs, I hurried on deck. It had already blown up to half a gale—not enough



SAN JOSEF ISLAND

to whitewash or flatten the short seas, but sufficient, at least, to kick up a nasty chop which merged shoreward into lofty grounders and fringed the strand with a booming frenzy of surf. Nor was the *Velero* very far from the brink of it all. Much scope having been added to the chains earlier in the morning, she could ill afford to drag.

In the chartroom I met the skipper and Captain T——. They had decided to make a run for the offing.

"No use," said Allan, "trying to save that skiff. We've got to get out of here."

"Skiff! What happened to her?" I cried loud enough to make myself heard above the rattle of windows.

"She went ashore last night," replied the skipper.

"Farmer's knot, you know," added Captain T—— with an air of supreme disgust.

I cast my eyes in towards the breakers, and there, on her beam ends with one gunwale half buried in the stones and water searing her in'ards, she lay—an able little boat that had found a very warm spot in my heart. With the freeboard and sheer of a dory, high transom and diminutive skeg, she had, more than a few times when landing was deemed even by the skipper as past consideration, carried Arch and me through the breakers and, scarcely wetting our feet, put us safely ashore. She could poke her flaring bows into the very green of a comber and, while the water boiled over amidships, bob up, sky-bent, like the sudden zoom of an airplane, and crash down into the trough with all the resiliency of a whaleboat. I couldn't bear to leave her there for driftwood—something to which already she would have been reduced

had not the big seas cast her high and anchored her with stones.

"Give Arch and me twenty minutes," I pleaded. "I think we can get her."

Allan smiled, tossed me a short glance, then thoughtfully gazed shoreward at his skiff. He was proud of her. She was something of his own design, and he knew her worth. He cared to lose her no more than did Arch and I.

"All right, go to it!" he said. "But I can't spare much time. We've got to get out of here while there's still a chance. Be careful."

We were very careful; and we knew that we had to be. Not that any real sea had yet arisen, but it requires very little from the deep to raise tremendous waves near shore; and, even from where we stood, viewing the hoary backs of them, I knew that never had I dared breakers greater than these. Our plan first of all was to get a line ashore and to put ashore ourselves. For this, Bob the bo's'n ordered over the lifeboat while I called for Perry, the best boatman of the forecandle, to join us. With the lifeboat swung astern, he, Arch and I slid aboard, made fast a long line to the after ring-bolt, and coiled another one forward while the boatswain paid out to us from the deck of the *Velero*.

There was no choice of direction. With the drag of a long hawse astern, we went with the wind and the sea, using the sweeps only to keep her out of the trough. We had not far to go. Amid white rolling seas that often screened the yacht from view, we signalled the boatswain to belay. We were in far enough, being just outside the lines where waves, having risen to their maximum, began to curl and

break. And the sight of them! As they leapt up green and translucent to shatter and lunge forth in white fury, I was struck by a kind of ecstasy. Just as great heights have caused lovers of life to jump, I felt the insane desire to hurl myself into them, to become a part of them and to dash on, thus disguised, into eternity.

Indeed, with a few significant revisions, this was part of our plan; and, leaving Arch to handle the lifeboat, Perry and I, taking the free end of the coil, went overboard. Then, tumbled and tangled and turned and jerked and twisted and bumped we swam, gained a footing, were knocked down and tangled and tumbled and twisted and jerked again. How we managed the line, I don't know. It was with us, at any rate, when we stumbled up the beach.

Meanwhile Arch, tossing about in the stream, was having troubles of his own. The breakers, as breakers are apt to do, drew back their battle lines and now were engaging in a surprise attack from astern. Besides this, the wind had increased, and while the doctor struggled to keep from swinging broadside-to, malicious gusts pounced down upon him, snatched his sweeps from their locks and attempted to carry them off. But the boatswain, with all hands to help him, gave way; and, before the boat could ship more than several seas, she was safely beyond again.

The skiff, with the scud dashing about her, lay a hundred yards or more down the beach. There was no such thing as getting the lifeboat closer to her. It was the skiff that had to be hauled closer to the lifeboat. We began by gathering the scattered equipment. I grappled first with a bilge board. As I held on to one side, it lay out on the wind as flat as a

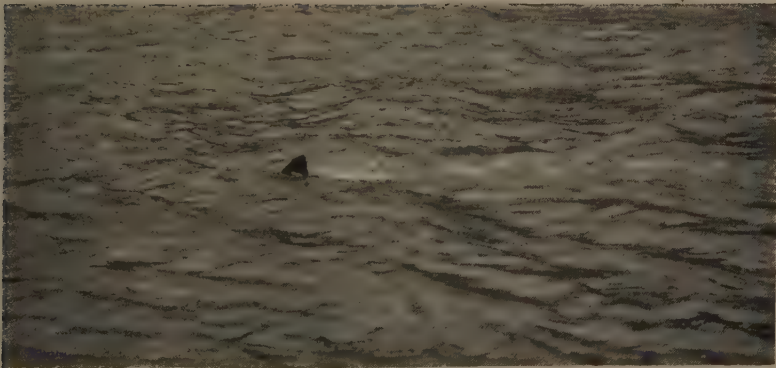
table. But not for long. It jibed over. It slammed me in the ribs. It knocked me down and would have sat upon me had not I too had some experience in wrestling. During this time, Perry, a veritable athlete and skilled tumbler, tussled similarly with an oar. The wind, catching the blade of it, first from below, then from above, was making every attempt to club him to death. He zigzagged along at right-angles to a beach that sloped forty degrees; and after a hundred yards of such struggling, he, like myself, was all but breathless.

Dragging the skiff was easier. Righting her was not. It was hard labour digging out the rocks; and, during the process, we, boat and all, were many times nearly swept out by the seas. At last, however, she was light enough to turn bottom up. We turned her so, then made haste to right her. I had always believed that skiff to be an airplane at heart; but I shall never forget my astonishment when I saw her actually flying. Perry was a strong man, and there was also what strength I possessed to help him; but surely, no matter how hasty had been the act, we could not have tossed a heavy eighteen-foot boat ten feet in the air and about twice that distance up the beach. Nor would we have been so inclined. It was done, however. No sooner had we lifted the gunwale three feet off the gravel than up she flew, snatched from our hands by the winds, whirled in the air and smashed down upon the dry stones. No other skiff could have stood it. On close examination we found not so much as a fractured rib; and she was no less intact after being dragged, length for length, one hundred yards over volcanic stones, shell and broken coral.

Breakers, as it might generally be known, have



NATURAL BREAKWATER.



WHY SWIMMING IS NOT POPULAR

SAN JOSEF ISLAND

spells of violence and spells of comparative calm. It was during one of these latter phases that we got her into the water, made fast the line and signalled to Arch to give way with all his might. Wading in, I had taken a short, firm grip on the painter while Perry bent to the oars. She hurtled the spent portion of the first breaker rather daintily; and with the boiling outward sweep we spurred her on. I ran and plunged to match her speed, doing what I could to hold her from sheering broadside, then made a jump for the gunwale, missed, jumped again, missed again. Everything went wrong. A sea piled up. Perry, with both oars snatched up from their locks by the maddening wind, "caught a crab" and went sprawling. A treacherous undertow whirled us broadside. Arch disappeared, the yacht disappeared, the world disappeared and the sky. The mountain of dappled green was beginning to hiss. It curled, yawned, and left us staring into the hungry blackness of its maw. One last firm foothold, and a lunge through the water was granted by fate; and seizing her at the stem, I shoved for my life.

That was about all for the moment. There was general chaos and a feeling that both arms were being jerked from their sockets. Up we shot. The world came back with a boom and a swirl of white. Then, as if the boat had been suspended in mid-air, she dropped and struck with an impact that left me stunned. Evidently I was aboard—had stumbled aboard like a bundle of wet laundry into a tub of suds. Evidently we were still afloat and Perry had handed me an oar expecting me to use it. Evidently we were in for another drenching; and instinctively I sprawled aft to lighten the bows for the next. Instinctively—

that was all. There wasn't a thought in my head, nor a breath in my lungs, nor sensations of any kind in my body. I had a hazy notion that we were still in the breakers, because breakers were all I could see—one very large and dead ahead. Thank the Lord that it *was* dead ahead. And thank Arch too, for he was still hauling away, and the Lord wasn't helping him much.

At any rate we took this one in good form. *Spank! Crash!* Booming she went, head on, and bobbed up like a cork through its comb while the best of it shattered astern. We had shipped plenty of water, but there was room for more and now we were through the lines, Arch was resting, and the boatswain, with all hands including the captain to help him, was hauling lifeboat, skiff and all toward our goal.

It was not long before Arch, Perry and I felt the firm deck of the *Velero* beneath our feet; and, as they hauled the skiff inboard on the davits, we regarded her with as much pride as if she had been our own. The act of saving her had proved her worth the saving. A bit of paint and she'd be as good as new.

Allan meanwhile was busied with other things. His worries had only begun. With both anchors a-weigh and their chains creeping foot by foot into the hawse-pipes, the wind was proving a match for our three hundred horse-power. Not one foot, not one inch did we gain. Despite the engines' full speed ahead, we were drifting slowly on the lee shore. It would have done no good to let go the anchors now. There remained no berth. The breakers were too close astern.

I joined the skipper and Captain T—— on the bridge. Neither of them spoke. If worried—if *very*

worried, they were always calm. Now they were very calm.

"Let me know when those anchors break surface," Allan said when he saw me.

There lay our only chance. Relieved of the drag, she might gain. But it seemed that she did not. The anchors clear, she barely held her own. I had given the signal from the forecastle head; and when I swung again into the wheelhouse, Allan's lips were compressed, set tight against his teeth. He said something that I could not hear; but I believe he was talking to his ship; and I believe, too, that she heard him. She seemed to buckle down with renewed energy. The wind shrieked in its defeat, clutched at her awnings, ripped them up and down, tore out the iron stanchions, snapped them into pieces, bent them like wax.

But she forged slowly on; and while we fought with the slatting canvas and wreckage, the breakers of San Josef blurred and faded in the distance.

"So much for you poor ground swells!" cried old Captain T——, "*Now! Let a big sea roll in!*"

And, scudding down before a moderate, rising gale, we made towards Cape San Lucas.

PART TWO
BYWAYS



IN LOWER CALIFORNIA

CHAPTER I

ROMANTIC SAN BLAS

OUR experiences among coastwise islands were, as already suggested, interrupted by many calls into ports and bays of the mainland; or, more accurately, it was quite the other way round. Mexico proper, I must admit, came as a revelation. In vain I looked for the chewing-gum wrappers, in vain for the fat woman from "The States" wearing a Mexican *manton* and a peon's sombrero, and in vain listened for the phrases of "back home" and "in God's country." It may be true that God has been a bit partial to the eagle with the arrows and the twig, but the bird of Mexico, although it stands upon a thorny clump of cactus and grapples with a snake, has accepted certain blessings for its own. These are not always apparent; but I noticed one conspicuous everywhere: there were no towns dependent upon tourist travel. What some of them did depend upon was often difficult to guess. Perhaps it was the bright and eternal *mañana*, for indeed they had chanced upon another spell of peace, and were basking, or dreaming, in the warm glow of its possibilities.

Joe, who had visited La Paz and Guaymas during a former voyage with Allan, said to me:

"Don't come to the west coast of Mexico with the idea that you're going to be disappointed."

But I did. And I *was* disappointed—disappointed,

however, in a very discriminative sense of the word. A cynic is not often agreeably surprised, but there comes a time when he has the wind knocked out of him. Mexico, as seen first on entering Mazatlan, had knocked the wind out of me, left me speechless and dizzy; and even now, as we sailed into San Blas with anchors ready to let go, I had not entirely recovered.

To come from a civilization such as our own, and to spend weeks among uninhabited islands such as Guadalupe, Clarion and Socorro, is to find exactly what might be expected. That is, anything or nothing. We had found both. We had found the adventure sought, the adventure expected; and we remained therefore unsurprised. But then to be dropped, *spank!* upon Mexico—Mexico carried to its *n*th degree, Mexico unspoiled by the English-speaking traveller, Mexico forgotten by commerce, feared by enterprise, blissfully lazy, happily poor, indifferent and reluctantly-waking Mexico of virtually a century ago! To be tossed suddenly into this atmosphere; and to realise that one is only three or four days from home, is to sympathize with the “Yankee in King Arthur’s Court” or “Alice in Wonderland.”

For over a week in Mazatlan, where I had resorted to everything from the hottest native dishes to the strongest native drinks, I had been trying to orient myself—to see things as they really were, but sailed away, little the better for wear, my only consolation being that we were to return again for a longer sojourn.

Now we were drifting in toward San Blas in the state of Nayarit, where grizzly mountains dropped down to the rolling slopes of jungle, and a yellow beach, green-shrubbed behind and breaker-fringed

before, stretched from a flounced and ruffled bar and a jade-green bright lagoon on to a mere ribbon, a string, a golden thread, then disappeared. With the exception of several adobes whose shadows blackened the arches of long low colonnades, the town was hid somewhere deep in a clump of palms and hedges of acacia. Not until we were well in did the thatch of wattle huts peep up, though very indistinctly amid timid lights and spots of sun that the breeze flicked through the fronds.

It seemed strange, as from the bridge I gazed upon this long-neglected Paradise, that here was another place where "no one ever went," where "no one cared to go"—very strange, for surely it could not be said of San Blas that there was "nothing there." I recalled a pathetic incident of a trim and conscientious little housemaid whose occasional words, as Shakespeare said of Ophelia's, were "like sweet bells out of tune." She was overcome at times by odd "spells" which caused her to tiptoe quietly to the first person who chanced her way, and, with knowing nod and mysterious mien, to whisper:

"Sh-sh-sh! . . . I have a past!"

And I heard this whisper now on the offshore breeze from the town of old San Blas. Nothing there but gnats, they say. Perhaps; but it has a past—a rich one known to commerce of fifteen years ago; a dark one known to the marauders of the late revolution; a strange one recorded in the earlier records of conflict between "liberals" and "reactionaries"; and, earlier still, between the royalists and insurgents; and a glorious one of almost four centuries ago, for San Blas was not beyond the range of activities in the latter years of the Spanish Conquest.

It was here that Hernando Cortez, "conqueror, governor, captain-general of New Spain, admiral of the South Seas, first Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca," as his contemporary Bernal Diaz has summed him up in ancient writings, was believed to have built many galleons for his exploration of the Pacific Coast. It was here, later, that traders from China and islands of the Far East called with their rich treasures for transportation to Vera Cruz and thence to the courts of Spain; here, too, that a handsome citadel was built, and that Franciscan Friars, with a grace of architecture that has passed from the earth, built edifices elaborately carved of stone. The remains of all this, still standing to-day, are smothered in jungle, giving way for crowding roots, trunks and branches, and crumbling before the natural ravages of time.

San Blas is old; and it is all but forgotten even by the country that owns it, although its rich mines, forests and fertile soil were no small sources of revenue some few years ago when shiploads of silver, gold, coffee, rice and lumber were exported to the merry clink of more than three hundred thousand dollars a year. Since then its population has diminished more than fifty per cent. There is no more trade, no more enterprise, no more industry. There is neither dock nor railway terminus. There are adequate means of transportation neither by land nor sea, nor even the slightest inducement for commerce. The harbour, having been filled with mud from the Santiago River, is no more than an open roadstead. Why dredge the bar when merchant ships never come? Why cut mahogany, teak and other valuable hard woods when there is no one to take them away? . . . "Why didn't they patch their roofs? Because it was raining?



A NATIVE DUGOUT. SAN BLAS



OLD BUILDINGS. SAN BLAS

Why didn't they patch them when it didn't rain? Because then they didn't leak."

And so San Blas sleeps on. No one seems to mind. It does not, certainly. It is as happy as it is poor. Its people live and smile, listening to the lazy beat of the surf, the swishing of palm fronds, the occasional grunt of a pig, the crow of a cock or the bawling of a naked child. They grow their corn; they make their *tortillas*; they use their heads for the carrying of water jugs, and their hands to brush away the gnats. What more is necessary until prosperity comes to give them their portion of care?

Later I was to post a letter in the town. How would it go? I wondered. Oh, that was a simple matter. It appeared that, in pre-historic times, the Aztecs had built a trail across the continent which, several centuries ago, the Spaniards had improved for the sake of better transportation from the Pacific Coast to Vera Cruz. It passed through Tepic, Guadalajara and the City of Mexico; and thanks to that highway, which to a certain extent time has spared, a letter mailed in San Blas would, unless a ship chanced in, be sent sixty miles by burro to Tepic, thence by rail, perhaps, to its destination.

By this I do not mean to slight the Mexican mail service. In general we found it, together with telegraphic facilities, remarkably efficient. Burros are slow; but they are guarded well through bandit country; and generally, it seems, they get there.

All this lent charm to old San Blas. Even that sort of realism that crawls or hops on tiny legs, that flies on tiny wings, that gores with tiny tusks—that which is always attracted to poverty—could not tarnish the glamour of romance, but seemed rather to harmonize

with the primitive houses of woven sticks and old adobes, streaked and stencilled by time, and to add by coloured contrast to the glorious past.

San Blas, when it rises again, when warehouses will have been built, when ships will touch and trains will call, and when tourists, flocking in the streets, will stare through windows of plate glass at Mexican curios of American make, shall hark back to its picturesque atmosphere of to-day, and shall whisper from the tips of its feathery palms :

" Sh-sh-sh ! . . . I have a past ! "

CHAPTER II

REALISTIC SAN BLAS

It has been mentioned that the harbour is no more. There is a fine shelter, a channel of which is large enough to pass the Customs launch. This is true of nearly every nook on the coast; and, launch or no launch, the federal officials will get you every time. I've known them to pull a heavy boat five miles for the opportunity of questioning a ship's papers. But, like all human beings, they are strictly human—those of San Blas especially. They were our *dos amigos*, welcoming us at the start, entertaining us to the end. Even now, after advising the skipper regarding certain technicalities lacking in our papers, they were making plans for our conveyance through the jungles to Tepic, for our voyage to Las Tres Marias Islands, and for our entertainments in town.

Joe was having trouble with his wireless; Captain T——, completing anchorage data in the ship's log; George, engaged in the mysterious black art of photography, was locked away in his dark room; Arch and I, pacing the deck under the hot awnings, were speculating as to the possibilities of a *cantina* and a glass of cool beer while the boatswain got over the skiff, saying that we need not wait for the others; he'd land them in the launch. Accordingly the doctor and I deserted all hands and pulled for the shore.

Landing, the sun had parched us to the marrow and

the idea of a *cantina* fairly frothed its appeal. There was not far to walk. We were on a portion of the beach shaped something like an arrowhead, its tip pointing towards the bar and channel, its sides bounded on one hand by the sea, on the other by swamp-land and a calm stretch of lagoon. Here extending out about sixty feet, was a tumbled-down pier, to which several dugouts were secured. An old adobe building, which we found to be the Customs House, was hard by. It was surrounded by sand and fronted by a long abandoned tramway with mahogany ties that humped and wobbled on a drunken course down the main thoroughfare.

Save for burros saddled beneath *ollas*, there was no evidence whatever of traffic. There was not an automobile in town, and I doubt that there was even a horse. The streets, barring the unbarrable domestic animals, poultry and scattered litters of half-naked children, were nearly empty. Several white-clad Mexicans in sombreros and trousers either leg of which was no less extensive than a woman's skirt, loitered before the various huts. They puffed heavily upon their cigarettes, or struck at great clouds of gnats, this being the alternative which we were quick to recognize.

There was a slight breeze, but it was evident only from the barest movements of palm fronds overhead or the drifting of mixed odours from dwellings. On the banks of an adjacent swamp, a dark company of buzzards, the red splotches of their necks ablaze in the sun, strutted arrogantly about a flayed alligator, or thrust their bald heads into the carcass. Several scrawny hogs with rapacious grins shared the repast. They grunted, squealed, smacked and plopped their heavy lips. An hour later, as we were to notice upon

our return, there remained of the ugly reptile nothing but a clean skeleton.

"If we had forgotten our pipes," observed Arch, "these infernal gnats would be picking us to pieces in the same way."

They attacked even the dogs; and the Lord knew that the sullen creatures were tortured enough by other insects. Dogs in San Blas, as in every other inhabited place visited during our travels, seemed almost to outnumber the population, and nowhere did we find one identifiable with any particular breed. Short-haired, long-tailed, sometimes large, sometimes small, they were nothing but pure dog. Yet they seldom barked, seldom growled and seldom wagged their tails. From pillar to dump-heap they sulked, careless of everybody and belonging apparently to no one. Strangely, however, they were house dogs; that is, they could be seen as often indoors as out. And Mexicans of the lower class seemed impartial in this respect toward Towser.

Ambling along in the gutter, which, by the way, extended along the middle of a dusty concave street, we saw pigs, goats, chickens, ducks, geese, cats, parrots, and in one case a cow and in another a deer, either coming or going from the various huts, and keeping the town a bit cleaner than it might otherwise have been.

Once we stopped and stared, then burst out laughing. From the smoky entrance of a stick-built hovel ran a squealing pig—a tiny thing marked black and pink in a most peculiar way. One might have thought that it wore breeches. Following was another little piggie, this one of the human variety. He was a pouch-tummied chit of an Indian tot, marked black and pink in a most peculiar way. A pink shirt hung down to

his middle. Naturally—very naturally—he was black thence on to the dusty tips of his toes. He chased his terror-stricken double and waved a club in the air. It looked almost as though the pig had stolen his pantaloons. Children of that age, however, never wear them. They run wild with the animals, and, save for the flaked dirt upon their coppery bodies, they are often as naked as on the day of birth.

While we commented upon this, I noticed, a short distance away, a movement of something which hitherto had appeared to be a tall mushroom growing out of the cross-roads. It was, however, a peon, wearing a sombrero the diameter of which must have measured half his height. His trunk gave the unpleasant impression of having been severed in two, then bandaged together again, for he wore a blood-red sash, between which and his loose white garments was a long, dull-shining knife or *machete*. Even some of the children carried these dangerous instruments. They were used, it seemed, for everything from the slicing of bread to the felling of trees. They might also be employed for other purposes, any demonstration of which we were careful to avoid.

In this particular case, however, the weapon's owner, in moving, had not been spurred to this rash act by the sight of "Gringos." He was removing his headpiece in reverent observance of a funeral procession. We followed his example, while slowly a black-clad troop, their faces aglow with perspiration, moved by. Four hatless peons laboured under the weight of a box-like casket, while the dust from their sandals rose and settled upon a bent old woman and a sniffing child, trudging along behind.

Such sights are common in Mexico, where the death



WHERE THE MOSQUITOS BREED. SAN BLAS

rate is tremendous. In San Blas it is especially so. Fever comes with the wet season; and, for fear of being carried away by it, those who can afford to move find it well worth the energy to make for the higher altitudes—Tepic or the neighbouring jungles. Those remaining, linger in the shadow of death. It rises out of the swamp-lands, takes to wing and broadcasts itself in the form of great clouds of mosquitoes. The germs conveyed are of a plague known to the natives as *vomito negro*. It strikes with painful inflammatory disorder, and invariably takes its toll.

We passed through the plaza, a fairly well-cultivated plot of green divided by a clean bench-lined walk leading to a church. There were bordering shade trees chippering with blackbirds, and there were quaint kerosene street lamps suspended by gooseneck spindles, all symmetrically placed with respect to height and interval. We noticed, to our surprise, a marble figure, carved in rather modern garments and erected upon a pedestal. We looked for the inscription, but it bore none. Later we asked several of the inhabitants what hero was thus immortalized, but no one knew. *Quien sabe?*—and they shrugged their shoulders with a patronizing grin which we construed to mean that no other but a foolish *Americano* would ask.

We gained this information after much effort and patchwork translation during our sojourn in the *cantina*. We had found the place at last. It was a low, salmon-coloured adobe devoted largely to general merchandise. There were sombreros for sale, long tapering, home-made candles suspended by their wicks, sacks of corn, and strips of butchered tidbits covered with flies.

“*Dos cervezas,*” we had ordered.

The proprietor nodded and turned towards the "refrigerator"—a great block of lava into which had been bored six deep holes, each a trifle larger in diameter than the bottles contained therein, and each filled with water. From this contrivance cool and refreshing drinks were provided, and into it went other bottles from the dusty shelf.

Another odd invention—this to keep crawling insects such as ants and roaches from certain sweetmeats—hung from the ceiling. It was a platform suspended by four wires, each leading down through an inverted bottle the bottom of which had been broken off and the cork pierced to admit the pendants. These corks, acting as washers, made it possible to fill the containers with water and kerosene, thus forming a barrier against those little things that crawl. Winged insects had no competition whatever. But bother them! They didn't eat much anyhow; and the proprietor, when a customer called, could send them flying by a single sweep of his hand.

When we showed interest in a tame raccoon which, along with everything else in his possession, he wanted to sell us, we were invited into his patio, where, amid a clutter of potted things, banana trees and low cocita palms, were two handsome aigrettes with the rich and forbidden plumage about their necks and upper backs. While we stood admiring the birds, and murmuring for his benefit our stock phrase of "*muy bonita*" he nodded a "*si*" and produced a great box of feathers—hundreds of dollars' worth had he been in the land of dollars, where plumage such as that ran high and where the law said no. If he intended catering for smugglers, he owned a fortune there. Perhaps he was waiting for the days, not so far away,

I thought, when ships would call again and when the modern Adam would be tempted by his Eve to buy feathers and sew them into the lining of his coat! We, however, had no Eve to urge us. We shook our heads. I wondered if we were expected to believe that his two birds had yielded all those feathers. He chose to hold them responsible at any rate, since, as we understood, so many of the beautiful creatures had been slaughtered that Mexico held them now taboo. The restriction, however, was not enforced. They were killed, and killed by thousands, and we were perhaps fortunate to see, later on, so many of the survivors in their native state. The opportunity came on the following day, when, on the invitation of our friends, the administrators of Customs, we went inland by boat to the mouth of the Santiago River to hunt for alligators.

CHAPTER III

ALLIGATORS

WITH the prospects of adventure on inland waters, we skimmed the high lights from an early breakfast, and then met our friends, Don Francisco, inspector of Customs, and Señor Baez, local administrator, who, after swinging surefooted from their launch to the gangway, completed a six-handed round of welcome and joined in preparation for an immediate start.

Don Francisco, solid, tall, light of complexion, dark-eyed and of thoughtful composure, has the appearance of a man in the prime of middle age who has lived so strenuously his own life that he finds recreation and genuine interest in the lives of others—an attribute of modesty that works like a boomerang so that when he speaks there are ears to listen, hearts to sympathize, and minds to remember. He wears a cap, a thick, close-cropped moustache, and light lower garments of tan, well fitted to his heavy build and quiet nature.

Señor Baez, comparatively slight, a half-head shorter and with a moustache of the typical Mexican down-sheer, is both in attire and features dark; but in either case there is relief in pleasing contrast; for he wears a light Panama, there is a flash of white between the lapels of a black alpaca coat, and when he smiles, his entire being seems to burst into brightness, like the flick of an electric arc in an otherwise sombre room. Both men speak good English, barring a very slight

accent. They have a sense of humour; and we start with all formalities stowed below in lieu of which are several gun-cases strangely distorted by bottles of French imported ale.

Seven rifles, four shot-guns, several sheath knives, cartridge belts, together with a large box of ammunition and another of various refreshments, are laid carefully in the stern sheets of the Customs launch which, although it is scarcely thirty feet over all, has a crew of six peons. One of these, the skipper, who, we are told, is a good man when sober, has a sullen and dangerous look. This he applies with keen focus upon each of us while his vessel takes care of herself. Besides the *Velero*, she is the only power vehicle in the vicinity of San Blas, and I am conscious immediately of the familiar double-throb of her power plant. The latter is of the two-cylinder, old-time western make—an engine that diagnoses its own ailment long before it stops.

It is about to stop right now—complains of malnutrition. We are in the channel between high, howling breakers, lacking only thirty yards to gain the still waters of the estero.

"Gimmy ss-um gas! Gimmy ss-um gas! Gimmy ss-um gas!" warns the old motor: "*Undile, hombre! Undile, hombre! Un-di-le! Un—di—le!*"

The dark sabre-toothed skipper scowls, estimating the distance between his boat and the tumbled-down pier while three of his men rush forward with a five-gallon can of petrol.

"QU-QU-QUICK!" coughs the motor in a last desperate effort to get over her fly wheel. "*BUNG! Whee-z-z-ze! . . . Zum sick! Bung! Zum sick! Bung-BUNG! Bung-BUNG!*"

And although the clutch has not been released, she whirls on with a jar and a flurry of foaming wake, pounding furiously her anger at the thoughtless boatman's rebukes and unjust imprecations.

This sixth day of February, marking an anniversary of personal interest, has caused me to feel rather keenly a longing for certain company; and, for lack of it, I am resorting now to something of a snap-shot communication through the use of a Kodak and a very small typewriter. I have given my rifle to Arch and perched myself forward on top of the cabin where I may write as we chug along through the in-winding ways of the estero.

We are in the land where oysters grow on trees! This seems to be no uncommon phenomenon; but several of us, during our stay in Mazatlan, were guilty of laughing at the very idea of such a thing. In fact, I could not believe it until I saw with my own eyes the oysters in question growing as reported. Now, as we plough along the broad watery lane that is heavily shadowed by deep hedges of mangroves, I can see them even at this distance—oysters by the thousands, growing on trees. And there is nothing strange about it. Stranger by far are the mangroves. Whether from the swampy banks, or from a depth of several fathoms of salt water, they grow upon myriads of trunks, and if these are not enough to uphold the heavy foliage, they send down another support in the form of a pendulous shoot which soon takes root and lends its help. It is to these trunks and branching shoots that the oysters cling, completely covering them with grey and white shell; and, either by the falling of the water, or the upgrowth of trunks, they may be seen four or five feet above the surface. High tides

are sufficient to keep the lower ones fresh; the others die, but leave their shells among the branches. In this manner, and in nearly every lagoon on the west coast of Mexico, do oysters grow on trees.

Jungles, inhabited by wild deer, tigers and all manner of reptiles, and stretching away from either bank of the estero, are screened from view by the tall, bordering foliage. It would grow monotonous cruising in these waters were it not for the birds. At first, of course, there is some suspense caused by the next turn ahead; but, there at last, one sees only more lagoon and more mangroves and another turn. The birds, however, hold our interest. As graceful as a Japanese bronze are the giant cranes, posing near the jutting flats—immobile, picturesque as if placed there through the studied care of an artist. We see great numbers of white ibis which we often mistake for aigrettes, and many aigrettes which sometimes we mistake for ibis. And there are wild turkeys, ducks, snipe, curlew, and many other birds, some brilliant of colour, but the names of these even Don Francisco and Señor Baez do not know.

Now I hear commotion in the cockpit. I am nudged sharply by one of the natives.

"*Cayman!*" he whispers; and someone aft cries:
"*Alligator!*"

Several of the boatmen are pointing towards a small splotch on the water, moving periscope-like, but with scarcely a ripple about it, under the shadow of mangroves. There being no other portion of its anatomy exposed but the raised portions of its scaly head, the creature is all eyes, and close enough now to warrant a broadside.

Three rifles sound an echoing volley. A great tail

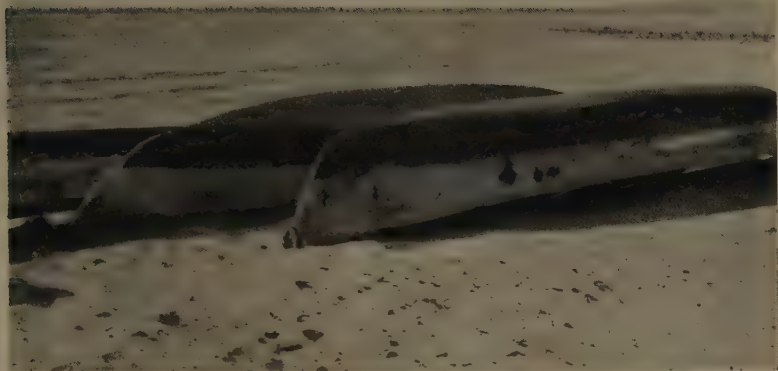
flies upward. It slashes down with the impact of a plunging projectile. The sabre-toothed skipper thrusts his leg into the engine room, takes hold of the clutch with his prehensile toes, throws it into a mad, growling full-speed astern and spins the wheel hard over. Several boatmen spring aft to guard the painters of dugouts and skiffs from the churn of the propeller; but Señor Baez shakes his head and motions his skipper on.

No use going after the thing, he observes. Alligators have an unaccommodating habit of sinking and, if killed, will remain at the bottom for twelve hours or more. To-morrow he will send the boatman up the estero to search for the creature. In the future, he advises, we should confine our shooting to shallow water, or the banks.

We move on, entering at length an extensive basin. Here, although alligators are swimming on all sides, no one fires. We anchor in several fathoms and put off in the various small boats, Arch and I with a native who gives the name of Gilberto Gamivilije and who is the skipper of a dugout.

These dugouts are remarkable boats. They are hewn from solid logs of mahogany. I have estimated some to be as large as forty feet over all. Very often they are equipped with sail. Entire families, including the goat, the pig and the dog, together with all household possessions and most of the house to boot, put to sea in these barrel- or flat-bottomed vessels, and cruise for hundreds of miles along the Mexican Coast.

Our dugout, however, is not so formidable. She is perhaps twice Gilberto's length and once again his beam; nor is she so heavy that she does not list within several inches of alligator banquet every time he dips a paddle. But then, small boats are like spirited



MEXICAN DUGOUTS



AFTER ALLIGATOR

horses: only when you trust them do they prove worthy of trust. Then, too, I observe that Gilberto is an experienced boatman. He can run along the gunwale from stem to stern almost without disturbing her. His costume is mostly velours hat, the rest loin cloth. He is slim and sinuous with a face that is mostly smile, and a smile that is mostly white teeth. He motions the doctor to a forward thwart and sets a small cracker box in the waist for me. He starts to paddle. Stops. He wants more room for his long naked legs. I move my box forward. He paddles again. Stops. The doctor is too much to starboard. Arch shifts to port. *Bueno!* And we start gliding slowly over the steel-grey surface.

He tells us, since by now the other small boats have disappeared into the various off-shooting channels, that we are "*in Poso de los Caymanes*" and that when we come close to one of the beasts, to fire away—all this in whispers which we do not understand save through his graphic gestures. We see several alligators, but they are too far away. Gilberto wants to move closer; and, as he paddles, there comes from his throat a loud, horrible, honking sound that echoes from bank to bank yet does not frighten our game. This, we learn, is an imitation of an alligator "calling to its mate." He lures them in this manner to the surface. When they come, and are close at hand, he hisses, nudges me upon the shoulder, shakes me so that I cannot see, and, in his tense excitement, points to a blur somewhere out on the water.

"*Cayman! Pss-ss-sst! Cayman! Bueno! Bueno!*"

If I happen to have the rifle, it is necessary, before taking aim, to wait for his commotion to subside. If I fire and miss, he says nothing. If I hit, he smiles,

paddles on and honks some more. Alligator hunting, though something of a novelty for Arch and me, is proving mild sport. I should rather spend my time in a shooting gallery, where, at least, one might have the satisfaction of hearing a bell ring.

Gilberto, however, while he seems to enjoy everything as it is, has something more in store. When alligators refuse to respond to his doleful wails, he swings us suddenly into a dark winding channel, so narrow that the foliage closes in above our heads and scrapes the sides of the canoe. Up this branch and down that we go, until I fear that even our guide has lost all sense of direction. Somewhere deep in the tangled maze of roots there is a strange clapping sound. We hear it aloud on one hand, faint on the other, before us and astern, but see nothing. We glance at Gilberto. He is totally oblivious. He places a hush finger to his lips, then, in an almost deafening roar, emits several resounding honks:—"Quank! Quank! Quanan-ank!" Then ships his paddle and listens. "Quank! A-won-onk!" he bellows again, and paddles on.

Now things seem more interesting because, amid the mysterious clapping sounds from the dark tangle and the steady dip of Gilberto's paddle, I begin to wonder which would please me more: to encounter or not to encounter an alligator. The terrible honking of Gilberto has nettled my nerves to the extent that, should there come a reply from an anxious "mate," I for one should be a poor hand with a rifle. Luckily the doctor has it now, and seems very much on the *qui vive*.

"Pss-sst!" blows off the native; and I am nudged and knee'd and all but knocked from my perch on

the rickety box. "*Cayman! Sacro Dios! Cayman! Cayman!*"

We have suddenly emerged into a large brackish lake, very shallow and surrounded by swamp-land and jungles. Arch is taking steady aim; and there, on a long flat of mud not thirty feet away, its ugly legs sinking into the black slime at every backward thrust, comes a gigantic alligator with damp, scaly back aglitter in the dim light. It is headed for the closest water. It is headed for us. Gilberto's hissing has turned into loud squeals of ecstasy. He strikes furiously at the water to give the doctor fair range. The rifle sounds in one short crashing syllable.

The alligator is already in the water, but its great tail sweeps out in a whirl of froth and blood. Arch fires again, then starts pumping. We are tossed on a great wave, Gilberto screeching his delight, cursing, and paddling in circles.

"*Bravo, señor!*" he cries, jabbing at the bottom, but encountering nothing but mud.

The creature has passed directly under us; but in an instant we see it again. It has run aground off our opposite beam. *Whack!* comes the horrible tail. It deluges us with water. It all but grazes Gilberto's paddle.

"*Whee-ee-ee! Sacra-dam'-hell!*" he cries, exhausting his knowledge of English and quanting a hasty retreat.

Arch takes quick aim at the monster's head. No report follows—nothing but a dull metallic click. It is our turn now to swear. Not only is the rifle empty, but our entire supply of ammunition is spent.

Gilberto shrugs, grins, says "*bueno,*" and starts describing a half-circle about the furious enemy.

Now we approach head on. The thing has only to open its mouth and close it again to rid us of half a dugout and one perfectly good physician.

But the boatman knows his business. Allowing plenty of berth for the slashing tail, he swings sharply alongside. He makes a sudden leap. He lands, though I don't know how, in the opposite end of the canoe. He bends over, seizes a great scaly foot and drags it partly inboard. There is a moment of chaos. I feel nothing but tumbling water. I hear nothing but a terrific slap-slashing of tail. I see nothing but teeth. *Sacra-dam'-hell* again, but Gilberto, using both hands and a knee, cries from the top of his lungs and the bottom of his heart :

" El otro, señor ! El otro ! "

Evidently he intends us to seize the alligator by its other foot. Arch and I, having done something of the sort in our experiences with turtles, make a successful attempt. That is, we manage to take hold of the great square fore-paw and to pin it over the gunwale—an act which immediately swamps us.

We are, however, safe on the mud. Gilberto leaps out with a line, slips a noose over the ugly head, a half-hitch about both jaws, heaves with all his might, and the alligator, at least fourteen feet long, becomes his captive.

CHAPTER IV

THE JUNGLE ROAD TO TEPIC

A TELEGRAM to Tepic, sent by Don Francisco, materialized before the San Blas Customs House early one Sunday morning. This materialization was in the form, roughly, of two automobiles. The driver of a locomotive, who has crashed into a machine or two and observed the results on either side of the track, might describe them better than I, and yet it was my impression that these particular cars had been wired together again. By squinting the eyes it was not difficult to identify, from the general outline of their hoods, differential casings and what remained of their tops, a very famous, or notorious, make of American jump-about. Perhaps they were survivors of several Mexican insurrections; perhaps fugitives from a wrecker's establishment; but if indeed it were the sixty-mile trip from Tepic that had reduced them to this sorry condition, I marvelled at the drivers' audacity in hoping to run them back again.

However, one could see at a glance that these were brave men. There were two to a machine, each wearing a loaded cartridge belt, holster, and the inclosed wherewithal for any commercial transaction which might involve us with bandits along the road. It being our policy, while travelling inland through inhabited parts, to leave all firearms behind, we were to trust now to the wit and marksmanship of our drivers.

Accordingly we took our seats, waved *ádios* to Don Francisco and Señor Baez, and, with a whirl of sand and mad blaring of claxons, bumped the bumps of San Blas. We caught the blur of black, staring faces, of scurrying pigs, goats and poultry. Dogs, contrary to their provincial natures, barked—barked, I fear, at our pathetic arrogance. I wanted to explain to the beasts that, regardless of this pitiful display, we were not trying to run over them; but, as I learned a moment later, we were.

Among the hired Mexican drivers there seems to be keen competition in the matter of dog killing. The claxon, which bawls incessantly, is employed to summon spectators. The driver is ever watchful for these, but the response, though noticeable, seldom satisfies his vanity; and, for his disappointment, some dog must pay. He'll show them, *valgame Dios*, what an automobile really *is*! And in pursuit of some unfortunate mongrel, he swerves from the road, grazes a lamp post, jumps back again, makes a right-angle swoop to the opposite side, misses a tree and, if he does not hear a heartrending little yap and feel a crunching of tiny bones beneath his tires, he grumbles bitterly but hopes for better luck next time.

The machine accompanying that in which Captain T——, Arch and I were riding, had three poor pups to its credit before the day was over. In passing through every village on the long road, I found myself pressing upon imaginary brakes, twisting an imaginary wheel until, with my nerves shredded into small bales of breakfast food, and my patience snapped in two, I cursed the driver and snatched with such violence at his wheel that we barely missed a spectacular entry into one of the adjacent huts. Some small cur owed

me his miserable life; and, for this, if later we meet in the Happy Hunting Grounds, he may blame me. Dogs in Mexico, being purely dog, lead purely a dog's life.

Our journey, for other reasons, was not a comfortable one. Means of road improvement must have been confined to one of those long, heavy cutlasses or *machetes* carried by the caballero. Were it not for this, even a mule would find it difficult in places to follow the highway. Jungle foliage often scraped either side of the machine, sometimes tore fabric from the top and entwined itself so heavily above that it stole away the sky. Credit for this road is given to the Spaniards of early days; but, since it existed even before the time of Cortez as an Indian trail, I rather blame the Indians. It is scarcely more than a trail to-day—a rocky one at that.

We discovered, however, that our gasoline chariots were admirably suited to the conditions. They were flexible. Over sharp ridges they could buckle up amidships to prevent carrying away a transmission, or bend on a curve to save a dashboard or fender. We could see the hood portion aiming downward while the tonneau part took the climb. We could hear the agonized screeching of the entire body, and feel the floor-boards squirm and bump beneath our feet.

The machine carrying Allan, Joe and George was faster than ours, which limped up the steep grades on never more than three cylinders, and very often on two. Consequently ours was the dust from the other. We sloshed through odoriferous swamps, galloped and leapt over rocky stream-beds, hissed with steaming radiator over mounds and ruts of steep inclines, crashed down the other side, plunged into dense wildernesses,

branched off amid boulders, bowled off amid branches, swerved, skidded, jumped, lunged and would have turned somersaults had necessity so demanded. I was jostled against my companions. I was sent forward against the driver. I was knocked back into my seat. I was tossed up, topped over the head, struck down, then walloped by a second upheaval that met me half way and hurled me up again.

Sometimes we grazed the cargoes of burro trains and sent the beasts into a mad stampede, sometimes we frightened pedestrians off the road and sent cursing caballeros smashing into the jungles, their horses in panic and their sombreros or scarlet serapes flying to the winds. All this amid the frenzied blaring of claxons that could have been heard beyond the ranges.

Our drivers, as I mentioned before, were brave men. They ran automobiles! They'd teach a few of these mule-driving road-hogs what an automobile, *valgame Dios*, really was! *Pss-ss-sst!*

This much of it was not agreeable, especially inasmuch as we protestant *Americanos*—or contemptuously *Gringos*, as we must have been regarded more often than not—were doubtless being held responsible. Accordingly it was with some relief that we came upon portions of road the nature of which forced our drivers to throttle down. Then only could we enjoy the scenery.

Trees were numerous and varied, many of them productive of such valuable timber as mahogany, ebony, ironwood and lignum-vitæ. Typical of this region was one tree without any leaves, but with yellow clusters of tulip-like blossoms so adorning its spread of white branches as to make it appear savagely immodest. Unlike other trees, too, it stood generally in the open



MEXICAN CHILDREN



OX-CART AT NAVARRETE

spaces where it might better display itself, and where its own splendour could not be rivalled or hid by the bloom and foliage of vines.

Acacias, of which there are about four hundred varieties and of which, I believe, three hundred and ninety-nine invade Mexico, thrived everywhere. The giant species elbowed its way to a height surpassing all other growth, its long branches reaching their feathery leafage to the sky. Tangles of bright-flowering morning-glory twined thickly about the underbrush, and garlands of lavender bougainvillea swung from above. Red, yellow and green was the plumage of monster parrots—hawk-like and peering down with pink, wrinkled faces. Over rocks, or in the shade of ferns and palms, iguanas, resembling small alligators, crept sluggishly, or lay immobile if the shadow of an eagle passed.

Orchids clung to almost every tree, not in bloom, but their bristling parasite remains were in abundance. To present Señorita Catalina de Casadore of Guadalajara, or some other little girl of the kind, a bouquet of orchids would be like sending Miss Vere de Vere Evangeline Gotrox of New York City a corsage attachment of red geraniums.

So far, however, we remained innocent of all high-strata social intricacies, although in passing through one of the several villages along the road, I chanced to call at the most pretentious of its residences. It comprised a roof of palm-thatch supported by a few sticks. It would not have done to board over the sides. The stove, a cubical structure built of rock and clay, having had no affiliations whatever with a chimney, would have filled the house with smoke were it not for the vast air spaces of the walls. These,

of course, would let in any slant of rain. But that didn't matter. The members of the household, if asleep, would be awakened by it and could easily move to some drier portion of the dwelling.

It was here that I was afforded genuine hospitality. After a journey of about thirty miles in our broncho automobiles, the half-way halt had come in the village of Navarrete, and, while the drivers refilled their radiators, I had strolled off alone. By simply saying, "*Ah, muy bonita!*" in admiration of an Indian child, I had unwittingly put myself on excellent terms with my host and hostess. They invited me in, where I continued to employ my "*Muy bonita!*" at every turn. There was an old pig, for instance, nursing six or seven little ones. "*Muy bonita!*" And there was a parrot in a cage. "*Muy bonita!*" And a dappled milch goat. "*Muy bonita!*" And a dog. "*Muy bonita!*" And two *señoritas* . . . I hesitated, not because they were any less *bonita* than everything else, but I noticed that the *señor* carried a long sharp *machete*. I spoke English to them—or *towards* them, there being no one who could take offence at that, regardless of terms.

They smiled, then burst out giggling, especially when later I attempted to address them in what few other words of Spanish I knew. It being Sunday, they were clad in their best. They even wore shoes and stockings; and the shoes, by the way, were patent leather. These girls, however, had passed the age limits of grace and beauty; they were at least sixteen years old; but their good natures and tolerance made up for it.

I was not asked to sit down; and, unless a few rusted five-gallon oil-cans could be given the name,

there were no chairs upon which to sit. Oil-cans—I wonder what Mexico would do without them. Often they take the place of stoves, sometimes shingles, sometimes of wash-basins, sometimes of pots and pans and even—especially in the northern States—of the picturesque *ollas* for purposes of water-carrying. If Mexico can thank my country for nothing more, at least she must acknowledge whence her blessed oil-can comes.

With the exception of the quaint stove, and a certain primitive cooking utensil, oil-cans alone furnished this house—both rooms. I could see through the wattle wall into the second chamber, and again through another similar wall into the house next door. The thatch ceiling alone interrupted a perfect view of everything. This was smoked rather black, but free from cobwebs. The floor was clean and well weeded.

While I learned a few new words of Spanish from the young ladies, my hostess returned to her duties. It was nearly lunch-time; she was making *tortillas*. A heap of corn batter lay upon that instrument of broad fame called a *metate*. It is a small inclined table, in dimensions about twelve by eighteen inches, having two short legs at the lower end and one, somewhat longer, at the upper, the whole being cut from a solid block of stone. Its use is universal throughout the country. Since the time of its invention, at least four hundred years ago, it has known no perceptible improvement and probably there are no substitutes.

In using it, as I noticed, the *señora*, holding an elongated rock in her hands, struck down upon the *maiz*, smoothing some of it over the flat surface. Then, scraping a portion of it up, she pat-pat-patted it on one side, pat-pat-patted it on the other, and so on

until it took the form of a pancake which she laid gently upon the clay stove to bake.

All this, however primitive, was in perfect harmony with all else. In the back yard, for instance, was an ox-cart in which the family sometimes travelled. If life grew monotonous in Navarrete, its members had simply to climb into this handy little vehicle and, taking all possessions with them, move to Juan Casta or some other little settlement along the road. The cart was nearly half as large as the house and far more substantial. Its roof of palm thatch was supported by fifteen or more staunch branches. The wheels, comprising segments cut cross-grain from trunks of trees, were secured each by an iron rim, and held in place by a wooden peg driven through a hardwood axle. The oxen, when not needed for the cart, were used to draw a wooden plough in the various corn-patches of the village.

Everyone here seemed happy and content. This being a holy-day, and there being no church in town, quaint little family shrines at the front of nearly every hut had been decorated for the occasion. Flamboyant paper ribbons, of red and green, bits of tinsel, blossoms of bougainvillea and dogwood adorned the crucifixes or miniature two-stick crosses. Evidently all ceremonies were over, all shrines being vacant.

Children clad in white skirt-like trousers loitered on the road but did not play. Men did likewise, generally holding themselves aloof from women and congregating in large groups on the corners where they could smoke their corn-husk *cigarritos* and speak freely. As warm days go in Mexico, evidently this was not one of them, the fact being evinced only by the flaring display of red serapes drawn tightly about the necks and shoulders,

and often covering half the dark faces of the peons. This robe serves not only as a cape, but also as a complete sleeping equipment. During the cooler seasons in these rather high altitudes, it is fairly a part of the man. If he is walking, he allows it to drape in long, heavy and extensive folds from his shoulder; and, however sloping might this shoulder be, whether he leans, lists, or whirls about, it stays there. He never touches it unless it is to wrap himself more tightly or to discard it altogether. It is held in place by nothing but knack and mystery.

I had no time for the solution of this problem. I heard the infernal bawling of our claxon; and, with one of the *señoritas* accompanying, made for that tattered wreck of a jump-about which was to carry us the remaining thirty miles. The girl was examining the miserable thing as I climbed aboard. She smiled whimsically; then, with a sardonic little twist to her mouth, whispered:

"*Señor! . . . Muy bonita, eh?*"

But before I could reply, the foul-mouthed claxon was swearing at her. A sudden lurch ahead sent me back into the doctor's lap. The dust rose skyward from the machine ahead while, half-blinded, I gazed astern into a swirling vacancy and waved good-bye.

CHAPTER V

CHURCH BELLS AND UNMENTIONABLES

WITH something more than seven bells jolted out of us by rocks and ditches of the old Spanish road, we were as much dusty wrecks as the vehicles that carried us at last into the little city of Tepic, and to make matters worse, it seemed that our good friends in San Blas had clandestinely summoned for our benefit a reception committee, several members of which had held us up fifteen miles from town and plunked us down, sorry sights that we were, in a private reception room of the best hotel. We were confronted there by a dazzling array of frock coats and tea gowns; and thanks only to the geniality of our hosts, or perhaps to several highballs promptly administered, were we put at ease and enabled to take part in the conversation—a conversation, by the way, that proved rather awkward. It involved three languages. Of theirs, most of us knew only a few phrases; of ours, most of them knew no more. It was often necessary, therefore, to resort to French, which, when it failed, was promptly supplanted by a few words of Spanish or English.

Thus most of the afternoon dwindled away. Our intention being to make an all-night ride back to San Blas, I wondered what opportunity we should find to explore the town; but, as I was to learn shortly, the matter was decided. Allan had been persuaded that it was dangerous, especially for strange Americans,

to travel after dark along the ancient road. He was warned of banditry. To start to-night might be to end amid bullets and slashing *machetes* many miles this side of our destination, and to drift forever as spirits through the jungle. A pleasant thought, indeed, but excuse enough to grant our tired bodies the rest for which they craved. We discovered, however, much to the disappointment of our hosts, that the large establishment was full. We should have to go elsewhere for accommodation.

We went, signing our names at last in the register of a certain hotel, once a palace that had been built at the time of the Spanish conquest. Any bed, we thought, meant sleep; and, waiving all further ado of our new friends, who feared that the place might prove most uncomfortable, we set out to see the town.

For me the curtain rose on Tepic as upon a show of marionettes, everything in proper setting, typified, animated, modelled in miniature and operated as if by masterful, invisible hands. There were tiny streets of cobble-stone set off by squat adobes standing close to the sidewalks and blending in the delightful colours of salmon pink, sky blue, buff and the green of matrix jade. Towering beyond, church steeples of sombre grey fairly rocked from the crashing din of their bells, while little old women, with black *rebozos* draped from their heads, trudged out of this door, or waddled out of that in hurried response. Dark *señoritas*, all splotted with powder and peeping out from dresses pink or blue, gazed through barred windows for the passing of a *caballero*; for one there was, of black moustache, black coat, black horse and spurs of shining silver.

Although it was Sunday, there was much traffic,

mounted officers of a nearby post, many "sea-going hacks," a few mules, burros and even automobiles. The plaza was ablaze with life and colour. There were green plots of grass, flowering shrubs, and trees, together with a weaving throng of people, trimly clad and flashing in all the shades of a tropical rainbow.

Our attention was called to the fact that the inner sidewalk of the square was given over entirely to the men who strolled in one direction, while the outer part was confined mostly to women who strolled in an opposite direction. The reason, as our friends explained, was due to an old custom. We were to notice that there were some few men on the women's side. They had already found some desirable acquaintance, and, before long, nearly every girl would have an escort, nearly everyone would be bound in the same direction and few men left to stroll the inner walk. We were also to notice that the peon class did not mingle here, but confined itself happily to the other side of the street.

Nowhere in the world is class distinction more clearly defined than in Mexico; and nowhere in Mexico, I dare say, more strictly imposed than in Tepic. Here no one doubts one's position in society. A striking example of this is afforded by weekly dances held here out of doors in an attractive grove near the city limits. In this pleasant spot, one particular evening is set aside for those who regard themselves as members of the upper division, and another for those who acknowledge themselves the lower. Nor is there often cause for embarrassment due to obtrusions. It is not snobbishness. It is simply the result of a workable plan based upon the right of every man that lives to mingle and be happy in his own natural element.

Where democracy exists in Mexico, it seems, strangely enough, to be genuine. Cities of my own country often boast if there is sufficient enthusiasm among the rank and the file to support community playhouses. Tepic takes it for granted. Despite a good and continued supply of American films to a local moving-picture theatre, a community auditorium in this little town stands as a chief source of entertainment. Its actors, producers and general management are from all classes; and the members of the audience, to insure themselves of accommodation, line the street before the doors are opened.

Democracy, however, is an ideal of which Tepic does not boast; it would rather achieve harmony through a strict and wholesome observance of natural convention. It stands upon ancient customs; it thrives upon co-operation; and the matter-of-fact understanding of these things has led to its contentment and prosperity.

I had thought of masterful and invisible hands; and now their actual existence was made known. Tepic, and most of the surrounding country, I was told, was practically owned and controlled by certain individuals who had never laid foot upon Mexican territory. These were two elderly and aristocratic little maidens who lived in Spain and received vast incomes from their sugar plantations, cattle ranches and farms not far from the city. The management lay with their nephews who lived in the town and employed numerous sub-managers, clerks and great armies of peons.

A number of these labourers were present now in a special quarter of the plaza used as a market place. They were taking advantage of closed shops and their "day of rest" to effect the sale of certain nick-nacks. Many of them, their arms folded beneath fiery serapes,

stood as stiff and conspicuous as a garden display of "red-hot pokers." Others squatted, Indian fashion, or sat quietly in small chairs beside their stands, where copper and sometimes silver rattled in exchange for deadly pinkish cakes, tobacco, or sticks of sugar cane. All this, amid the angry protests of church bells that sounded furiously at intervals like so many iron foundries in moments of despair.

We returned late in the evening to a simple eight-course Mexican dinner. Fried rice that had never been boiled came on as *bouillon*; *frijoles*, red beans, were served as dessert; butter was supplied as a special dispensation; after-dinner coffee was hot milk flavoured with a thick, cold extract; but, excluding the last, everything was palatable. We more than satisfied our hunger, and it was not long before most of our party surrendered to another appetite and retired.

Arch and I did not. Perhaps we had sampled too much "coffee." At any rate we strolled out for a walk, but, being tired, returned shortly to the two rooms assigned our party. There was a light in one of them and upon opening the door we were surprised and somewhat embarrassed by the sound of a woman's giggling. No mistake, however. There was no one there but Allan. Our rooms were two of three subdivisions of a large chamber. They were separated by a kind of a high board fence. Captain T——, Joe, and George occupied one of these corrals, Allan another. The third accounted for the strange voices. All other accommodation in the hotel was held by travelling Mexicans.

"What's wrong?" asked Arch, gazing quizzically at Allan.

The latter was not in bed. He sat in a rickety chair,



DOORWAYS ARE ALWAYS OPEN

his head resting upon his hands and his eyes focused upon the partition where the deep-sea snorts of Captain T—— reverberated from the space above.

“ I don’t like to wake them, but——” He paused, frowned at his bed, then : “ I wouldn’t sleep there for a million.”

The bed looked all right to me. It was a cross-legged canvas affair with mattress, blanket and even sheets. Arch investigated. Being a physician well acquainted with the sources of typhus fever, he did not laugh when he noticed certain unmentionables that required no magnifying glass for detection. There was a second bed in the room ; this was to have been the doctor’s. It proved far worse. We attempted therefore to arouse our companions ; but they refused to respond. Arch told them that typhus, irremediable and deadly, was prevalent in these regions. But . . . devil take him and his typhus ! When they caught the fever there was time enough to call a doctor. Right now they wanted sleep.

Other attempts were equally futile ; and finally, as we walked to and fro on the broad balcony overlooking the patio, we consoled ourselves with the fact that the dreaded insects might have been confined only to the skipper’s room. Otherwise the men would have known it before now. Allan testified to that.

We paced away many hours. There was no such a thing as leaving the hotel. Unless we knew of some other place to go to, we should be promptly informed of it by the first policeman encountered, and sent there with an armed escort. Such was the nature of the department. Its members patrolled short beats. They stopped any stranger found on the streets at night after half-past ten o’clock ; and, if unable to give a prompt

and thorough account of himself, his was a night in gaol. Otherwise, he would have to know exactly where he was bound, then, transferred through relays of policemen, he would go there and nowhere else. The municipal force of Tepic was not to be trifled with. A former chief, now dead, was said to have taken the law somewhat into his own hands, and to have encountered, within one year, sixty bandits not one of whom had lived to see a trial. He died shooting, and his spirit went marching on.

I suggested that we should walk out and get ourselves arrested. Maybe there were beds in the gaol. Anything was better than this. The night was growing cold. We had no overcoats. We dared not use a blanket. We were tired of pacing. We had been tired before we started. And now sleep, bearing down heavier and heavier, was deadening our senses, paralyzing our tongues and rendering even the act of listening a hardship.

Allan could stand it no longer. He staggered off dazedly and crumpled upon George's bed, where, curled up in himself like a big tom-cat, he drifted off to oblivion. Arch fell into a chair on the balcony, I into another; but the cold crept into our marrows, and we rose again. Together we paced away more time, listening for the shrill sounds of police whistles that announced the termination of each hour, and cursing the church bells that banged intermittently throughout the entire night.

"If you won't come to church, neither will you sleep!" was their attitude; and the fiendish metallic clang was enough to raise the devil himself, deafen him, and send him back to hell with new ideas. Even Allan and George, half-dead as they were, awoke many

times amid the horrible din. Why the things should sound at this unseemly hour was beyond us. Perhaps to celebrate All-Fiends' Day. At any rate, I knew, if they did it again, I'd go mad. I felt myself slipping on the crumbling brink of frenzy already; and it was only two o'clock.

At length there appeared a night watchman. We wondered if he could enlighten us as to sleeping accommodation in the city gaol and attempted a conversation. He did not understand, but hurried away and returned with two flasks of rum. He did understand after all. We paid him, drank away our chills and managed at length to kindle a chat too intricate and heavy to mention here. It is strange to what heights a mind sometimes aspires when it flounders at the lowest ebb.

When morning came we could have been held accountable for very little. What we saw and heard was like a hazy delirium. We stood in one of the rooms, gazing out of the window at streets totally vacated save for a policeman who drifted along, stopped at a corner and shrilled madly upon his whistle.

As if this were a signal to commence firing, out of the grey quietude there came a rumbling as of distant thunder. It grew louder. It throbbed, rolled, then boomed like a hundred cannon. Bugles joined in a rousing blast. Three devils in a church tower sprang to their bells, waylaid them, struck them with sledges, attempted to crack them in two, shatter them. They clashed and they banged, but they could not compete with a typhoon of trumpets and a thunder of drums that came rolling down over the concave streets amid marching feet and waving flags and, as I thought at first, half of the Mexican army.

All this was a way of informing the citizens that it was six o'clock and Monday morning. If they wouldn't turn to, neither would they sleep. And the town was filled with marching—not of one company but of a half-dozen or more. We saw several, but heard them, every one, each engaged in its own particular strain of the bugle call.

Windows and doors began to open, the people to throng. Pack trains of burros appeared, mules, carriages and automobiles. All Tepic was awake and starting the day. Blue Monday meant nothing to it; but to me—I have never seen one bluer. Somehow we got back to San Blas; though I have only vague recollections of the journey. I awoke, to a certain extent, at intervals of about three seconds—that is, whenever we struck a rock, jumped a ditch, or ran over a dog. The claxon wailed like a dying cow. It served only to add torment to my dreams—dreams of police whistles, of blithe little chocolate soldiers that marched with drum thunder and bugle, and of clanging bells thrashing out at each terrific stroke all the terror of hell.

Mexico, with all the heavenly romance that is truly yours, if damned be your lot in eternity, it may never be said that you have not been warned in time. You have eyes to look upon Heaven; ears to listen to hell; and you have a manner of polite discretion whereby you may turn your back either upon God or the devil and choose, but cause no offence.

CHAPTER VI

"FOLKS"

A CERTAIN very distinct type of American is represented by those people who refer to themselves as *folks*. When *folks* travel there is no mistaking either the fact or them. In nature they are gregarious and strictly migratory, travelling always in packs and going nowhere unless it happens to be "the season." A foreign country to them is like an amusement park. They have only to pay the price of entrance to stroll in and watch the animals. Of course they expect their money's worth. They are privileged therefore to walk into a private residence, pick the flowers in the garden, sample the fruit, snap pictures of the baby and observe the mistress of the house as she goes about her daily tasks. Pointing at this, or laughing at that, as one might do in a curio shop, hurts no one's feelings because these natives don't understand English. Ignorant, you know. *Folks* have the right to make fun of everything because of ignorance. I don't mean the folk's ignorance. Far from it! That word applies only to everyone else.

Go anywhere and, if the *folks* have been there first, there is no mistaking that either. They have carved their names, their "back home" address together with the date of observation on all objects of interest, and they have chipped much of them away for souvenirs. One may learn, too, that they belong to the Smith or

Jones Excursion de Luxe. "De Luxe" means that they have been privileged to ask for a room and bath in any hotel and to complain in voices loud enough to be heard throughout the establishment when such accommodation has proved unavailable.

Yet *folks* must not be judged too harshly. Each of them is "out for a big time." He is good-hearted. He is a man among men—red-blooded and always democratic. A merry sort too—asks on many occasions "Is everybody happy?" and, whether riding a burro in the park or strolling through some place of holy worship, he seldom fails to receive a rousing response from his companions. He is an optimist, believing now that his affairs back home are taking care of themselves, that the natives hold too serious a view of life altogether. So, be it in the presence of nobility or of lackeys and cab-drivers, he just sort of jollies 'em all along.

Folks are Americans as known throughout England and France. They stand as our representatives in Italy, Switzerland and the Orient. They defended us in those parts long before defence was necessary. They put the chip upon our shoulders which, unfortunately, none will bother to knock off. In some of us it has taken root; and, if uprooted, there is the sore spot. It is a brand of ostentation, bravado and rudeness of the first water. Those guilty pride themselves upon their "Americanism," not knowing the difference between the Stars and Stripes that wave in their own country and those flaunted in the face of a foreign land.

In general, however, those parts of Mexico visited by us were not looking for the American shoulder chip. Evidently the *folks* had not been "doing" Mexico of

late. The west coast, at least, had been spared. France, I think, was being “done” this year.

But poor Mexico! It is evident that her time is coming. She is responding to negotiations for franchises from American railways. She is allowing foreign capital to organize steamship companies under her flag, and to build hotels to answer, in a measure, the prospective demands for room and bath. The Bald-headed Eagle has found new focus. It gazes down upon the deserts and the jungles and the towns, sees the picturesque waste of it all and the romance of its ancient existence. It begins even to realize the innocent welcome extended by the people. Surely, it thinks, my countrymen must be told of the wonderland beyond my southern borders. Then out go the circulars; down goes the “Excursion de Luxe”; and, with a “Hail! hail! The gang’s all here!” Mexico can never be the same.

Manzanillo, our southernmost port of call, had already suffered. Certain passenger lines running between Panama and San Francisco were in the habit of touching here; and, although at the time of our visit there were, with the exception of the consul, no other Americans in town, the good *folks* had left their initials behind them. Not that there was anything of value to carve or chip; but the initials were there in spirit, if not otherwise. Instead of the welcome hand, there was the itching palm; instead of the sincere and smiling eyes, we found contemptuous scrutiny.

We were attacked first of all by English-speaking pirates in dugouts and launches. One insisted that he was our agent; another, that he was better equipped for the position. Several more pounced upon the

steward, demanding his order for fruit, vegetables, fish and beef. Others pestered us for our laundry while boat-loads of pottery-pedlars clamoured at the gangway; and trimly clad salesmen, with bundles of laces, drawn-work and American-made serapes, shoved the protesting boatswain aside and attempted a siege of the main saloon.

Manzanillo looked the part. There were white wooden bungalows with shingled roofs, hideous sheds and warehouses of plank or corrugated iron, derricks and cranes, a wharf in the last stages of ruin and a waterfront strewn with refuse. The surface of the bay, dead and coated with a thick scum of oil, reflected a depressing heat. It made us feel as sticky as everything looked. All this, after travelling through what seemed a delightfully tinted dream of past centuries, wrought an awakening as crass as that caused by an alarm clock when sleep is sweetest.

Nor were my impressions altered upon closer contact. Everyone seemed to be looking for that chip which, though we prided ourselves on carrying no such a thing, was forced upon our shoulders. It evoked scathing glances from loitering groups on the street corners. One sullen individual, with his filthy sweating body shining out from between the tatters of his shirt and his lips all fence-posted with yellow teeth and well adapted to the sneer that he tossed us, aimed a shotgun at our backs as we walked by. It was only in fun of course; but not foreign to the general attitude which we supposed rekindled in our honour.

The exchange of American gold into Mexican silver became, for the first time in our experience, a problem. It seemed we were expected to accept a ten or fifteen

per cent. discount on the actual value. Luckily I recalled a similar experience in a similar port—this in a small mining town in South Australia. There, after being advised by the president of a local bank that I could get better value on American gold *by melting the coin and selling it to a local jeweller*, I had, as a last resort, gone to a shabby little waterfront “pub” where the barmaid, even before I could order a bumper of “arf ’n’ arf,” snapped up my gold piece and plunked down a full measure in silver shillings. I find that liquor establishments, in most small ports of the world, as a general rule are trustworthy and more accommodating often than the banks.

In Mexico, however, there are few banks, and fewer still worthy of the name. The average Mexican feels that his security is better when his money is locked in his own safe, buried in the ground, or carried upon his person. Business transactions, for this reason alone, are rather unwieldy. There seems to be little gold in circulation. Paper money has been done away with entirely. Silver pesos, now fifty cents in value, are quite as heavy as our silver dollar and equally bulky. One often sees some poor clerk, with a sack of coins thrown over his shoulder, fairly staggering from one place of business to another. In Manzanillo, with ten dollars’ worth of Mexican silver in my pocket, I walked a block from the *cantina* to the telegraph office, and arrived in a state of exhaustion. I sent a telegram. Walking back was easy.

Often we complained of the bulk and weight of Mexican money. We had no right to—especially in Manzanillo. There is always someone willing to relieve an American of the burden. I went, for instance, into a little clothing shop where I asked for socks.

The clerk showed me some flimsy, apparently cotton, things he said sold at "a half-dollar." His use of the word "dollar" instead of "peso" put me on guard, the former being twice the value of the latter. If I gave him a half-dollar, of course he would have accepted it; if a half-peso, perhaps. My intentions had been to buy more than one pair of socks, but now I thought it politic to establish some precedent as to rate. Accordingly I tossed a half-peso silver piece upon the counter. It nearly passed. He glanced at it, glanced at the socks then at me.

"One peso," he decided.

It seemed rather high; but, not caring to argue with a man who spoke and understood only enough English to serve his own ends, I acquiesced; but as I reached for another coin I perceived that the unheard of and ridiculous was about to happen. The scoundrel was wrapping *one sock*!

"*Dos!*" I demanded, holding up two fingers.

"*Ah, bueno!*" he grinned. "*Dos pesos por dos!*"

Two pesos for two socks! One peso for one! That was enough for my pride, to say nothing of my pocket. Taking up my money, and, in his own language, advising that he would be better off with the devil, I left him glaring after me, holding up the package and swearing a hearty response which I preferred not to understand.

Manzanillo is full of hundreds more just like him. There exists a very odd sort of fisherman in the harbour. His equipment, I think, consists of one small dugout and a gaff-hook. With the former he paddles quietly alongside of small vessels, like our own, and with the latter he fishes through open portholes for whatever lies within reach. During our week's trip inland to



MOUNT COLIMA

Colima and Guadalajara, he managed several profitable catches, amounting to four or five hundred dollars' worth of photographic equipment including a small moving-picture camera.

The laundry, too, did well. We had accumulated quantities of soiled wear during the several weeks of travel from our first port of entry. About one-third of my own garments sent out failed to return, this not counting several pairs of old Mexican cotton breeches substituted for my ducks, and similar little exchanges. As for the appearance of these, there were several ways of distinguishing the washed clothes from those which in the opinion of the laundryman were clean enough as they were. The laundered garments had been marked by short pieces of string tied to a button or button-hole; they were also quite damp—unironed, of course—and, being exposed now to the moist salt air, succumbed readily to mildew. But I didn't mind that. They had already been ruined past all hope of repair. Someone had dumped at least one carload of lye into the washing machine. Everything was eaten full of holes, as if exposed over a period of fifteen years to a million moths. For this service the bill amounted to about forty pesos.

Boatmen were a scrupulous lot also. It might happen, for instance, that Arch and I, stranded on a float, are unable to speak the boatswain aboard the *Velero*. Some kind Mexican, idling about in his launch, realizes the fact and comes cruising alongside. We ask him what he will charge to take us out. He regards us thoughtfully. He knows that our impatience puts us somewhat at his mercy.

"Two pesos," he replies.

Foolishly we accept the terms and, in two minutes,

are alongside the gangway. We start to pay the money. He objects. He meant two pesos *apiece*! We protest, but not wanting to foul the yacht with Manzanillo's police department, give in. He objects again. He tells us he wants four pesos *gold. Americano*! In other words he wants four dollars for a two-minute ride. He has gone up four times the original rate. The doctor is a man of thick Scotch blood. It takes some time for it to boil, but I can see that it is commencing. He glares at the greasy boatman. His colour alternates in splotches of red and white, but he decides now to say nothing. Casually he tosses two pesos into the launch's bilge, and together we walk up the gangway. We hear nothing more of the affair.

Any one of these things might be expected of certain people anywhere in the world; but in Manzanillo we learned to expect it of nearly everyone with whom we dealt. Perhaps much of it was due, not only to the fact that the port was often infested by easy prey for such exploitations, but Manzanillo, at a time not so long ago, was a centre of revolutionary activities. It was bombarded, ravaged and burned; and many of its people, joined either to one force or another, aided in the general pillaging and destruction.

The entire area from the harbour and a few hundred miles inland to Guadalajara seemed not yet to have recovered from the effects. Indeed, the country was said to abound, even at the time of our visit, with various tribes of bandits. Our journey by rail through these parts, however, evinced none of them, nor was it very surprising. Near the locomotive were five freight cars on top of which was an observation post comprising several platoons of Mexican soldiers, each

man equipped with cartridge belt, crossed bandoliers, and a very business-like German rifle. Besides this protection, there were several passenger cars through which the remainder of the company, equally well armed, strolled at will. That alone might have discouraged the average tribe of outlaws, but the defence was practically doubled in strength by male passengers, each of whom carried one or two firearms of his own. His jacket bulged behind from the bulk of a holster, and when he removed his coat, as often he did, a full cartridge-belt was displayed. In such surroundings, it is easy to imagine oneself as being back in the days of the frontiersmen.

No one, however, either expected or looked for trouble. Quite the opposite. On a Mexican train, nothing seems to be taken seriously, not even the time schedule. We were due to pull out of the station in Manzanillo at noon; but the conductor at that hour had just commenced his lunch. Evidently the future passengers were similarly engaged since there were no others in the first-class coaches but ourselves. A half-hour later the engineer began tooting his whistle.

After about ten minutes a carriage drew up. At first I thought it to be some sort of baggage conveyance. I could see, besides two men in the driver's seat, nothing but bundles and baskets and rolls. But they all became slightly animated. One rolled out into the dust. The rest took legs and walked, followed by a light-skinned gentlemen in tight-fitting breeches, short-jacket and broad-brimmed Stetson. Save for a heavy stick, he was unencumbered. He stroked his moustache and tapped systematically each pocket while several station hands relieved his family

of all burdens, and led a grand march for the train. A halt was called every few yards in order to buy something. Before they had reached the platform, they had bought everything—various devil-biting concoctions wrapped in *tortillas*, chicken tamales, sweet tamales and every variety of fruit known to Mexico, also an odd cluster of what looked like miniature balloons, pink and baby-blue, tied together with thread. This entrancing bunch of dainties, as we learned later, was Mexican chewing-gum. You put one of the little balloons into your mouth, enjoy the sensation of an explosion between your teeth, then chew away at leisure for a week if you like. It never loses its flavour. It has none to lose.

The family entered our car as if to take possession of every square inch. Two little girls ran to the far end, two little boys to the near, the mother to the left centre, the father to the right, while all the bags, baskets, bundles, rolls, robes and boxes filled all the space that remained.

The debate started. The *señora* objected that the *señor* was on the sunny side. The *señor* argued that the sun would come from an opposite direction in a few hours. Instinctively the baggage agreed with the latter and stacked itself, in a grand tumble, above him, below him, and on all sides of him. The *señora* hadn't time for refutation. She bustled down to snatch an old stump of a banana from her younger *hombrecito's* dirty paw; then, to stop his crying, rushed for the pile of baggage, withdrew another banana and scurried back like an excited "waggle-bug" on wheels. But the others wanted bananas too-oo. And so on.

By now, joining the fray, there were five or six more

families. Baskets, bags and babies were so gloriously mixed that I doubted if ever they could be identified again. It was a panic. Voices rioted from one end of the coach to the other. The whistle continued. The conductor motioned several stragglers to hurry. There came a terrific jolt, a moment of tense silence in which everyone, laying hold of the nearest means of support, stood as if suddenly petrified ; then a clanging of bell, and the corrugated-iron sides of the station began to move astern.

When one considers that every tie beneath the iron rails is of solid mahogany there might come a certain feeling of luxury, but not so if one looks about. The cars, extricated from junk-heaps of American barns, may be characterized by the iron-fenced platform, the suspended oil lamp, the swinging signal cord and the wicker-woven squad-columns of seats.

Although for us it was to be a trip covering half of one day and most of the next, there were no signs of sleeping accommodation, no dining car—or, more accurately, there was nothing but dining car. Eating was the chief pastime. Probably most of the passengers had enjoyed luncheon before boarding the train, but they started eating again immediately. They had bought everything in sight at Manzanillo, and continued to purchase more at every station along the road—tamales, *tortillas*, bananas, plantains, papayas, cakes, candies and small boxes of gummy cheese. Besides this they had brought with them great baskets of food to which they added what their appetites repelled and subtracted what their insatiable palates yearned for.

Some sort of beverage, of course, was necessary to wash everything down. Sweet-flavoured carbonated

waters and beer, which was sold in bottles aboard the train, answered the purpose; but the passengers could not stop at this. *Pulque*, a chalk-coloured liquor made from the maguay plant, might be had of pedlars in any station of the higher altitudes. Large gourds of it were offered at the windows—one tumbler, filled and refilled, serving as many of one group, and as many groups, as the sour-tasting national drink might tempt.

The odour of tobacco fumes vied with that of oranges. Papers, peelings, husks, empty boxes, bottles, ashes and cigarette stumps decorated the floor. Babies squalled, children squealed, women chattered, men laughed; and oh! how the *folks* would enjoy it all!

There is nothing more remote from convention, foreign to all formality—nothing more *red-blooded* and *democratic* than rail travel in Mexico. Strangers do not exist. Everyone chatters with *quien sabe quien*; bouquets and *boutonnieres* are transferred from group to group. Foods are shared, babies exchanged. If only there were not a second-class coach for the peons, it might be a case of the one and only workable soviet.

Rugged mountain scenery slides past. Most of the passengers are used to it, and are too busy with social activities to find it worth while. The movement of the train, fast and faster on the down grades, slow and slower—almost stopping on the up, reminds one of a roller coaster. Nearing the summit the exhaust of the engine is like the breath of a giant who has run away with himself and realizes suddenly an acute weariness. His seven-league boots are slipping; he puffs and blows as if his lungs are on fire; he falters; he pulls forward in a last savage attempt—pulls too



MOUNT COLIMA AND MOUNT SAFA



A SUBURB OF GUADALAJARA

hard, goes too far, and, being caught by an abrupt decline, again runs away with himself.

We have passed yellow cliffs of barren mesa land, as flat as a table and all set about with the great candelabra-like *cereus giganteus*, their square bristling elbows protruding from the mighty stalks. Another variety, closer at hand, with lofty entanglements of snakish shoots, recalls the Medusa head. And now, far off where the sky grows tired of its blue and the land weary of its sage-green and sand, towers the vague and misty grey of Mt. Colima and Mt. Safa, the latter more than fourteen thousand feet high and terminating a great volcanic chain that traverses the continent nearly from shore to shore. Everything is vast and stupendous. The engine screams in terror of it, plunges desperately down into an arroyo, thunders and clatters over a trestle with swirling green water below, belches smoke and cinders, and, like a mad dragon hurrying to its den, roars into a tunnel beneath the ranges.

Now, in the darkness, we inhale its stifling breath. Two lights appear and vanish. Someone coughs; others join in accompaniment. The whistle screams again, and a swirling, blurring cloud of smoke clears upon another scene. We are flying over the tops of things. An eagle soars below casting its shadow on the tips of pine trees that stretch away like a vast field of wheat. Beyond it rise dark sheer cliffs of rock where cascades of green and black and silver bend out from their mossy linings to tumble down thousands of feet to invisibility below the wood.

Suddenly everything rises, falls behind. We pull into a station; and a world of little things comes back. Dogs, oxen, burros, dirty little bare-legged tots,

wrinkled women with black *rebozos* draped from their heads or twined about their arms, and, of course, great baskets of edibles which none can resist.

But now, in shining contrast, comes a fire-eyed *caballero*. His horse is bedecked with trappings of silver, and silver are his spurs—spurs with wheels at least six inches in diameter. His sombrero is finely woven straw of snowy white; he wears a short black jacket, skin-tight trousers and a pistol the holster of which is of hand-carved leather. His alert eyes flash from face to face as he rides past the windows; then, a touch of the spur, and he is off. Our whistle drowns the thumping of hoofs. There comes a lurch and a crashing of couplings; and we move on towards Colima.

CHAPTER VII

“FOLKS” (*continued*)

COLIMA, a handsome little city of about twenty thousand people, was founded by Cortez, and stands to-day as the capital of its State. Here, where our train stopped for the night so that the passengers for Guadalajara and Mexico City might refresh themselves before proceeding, we were reminded of the “rival city”—Tepic. Of course, having arrived only an hour before dark and having left shortly before daybreak, we were no competent judges, but were conscious of a similar atmosphere. There were the long uniform rows of flat-roofed adobes, the narrow cobbled streets with central gutters and the old churches with their hell-raising clamour of bells. As in many other Mexican cities, there were two plazas, one for the rich, the other for the poor, and with contentment in each for its own. Poverty seemed more prevalent here. For the first time in our travels (though not for the last, since we were to visit Guadalajara) we were accosted by beggars. Tepic appeared more prosperous, more wide-awake—this despite the fact that our impressions of it might well have been darkened by certain little inhabitants that one doesn’t talk about, but *feels* so keenly.

We were glad to find better accommodation in Colima. Not that there was any lack of insects, but this variety was less repulsive and confined its activities to the slippery runways of tile flooring. It is a strange

feeling, as George, our photographer, may remember, to plant a bare foot upon a cockroach. But then, such things are comparatively harmless. In these parts there is another insect more to be avoided: the scorpion. The pugnacious little creature, with all the grace of symmetry that its two groping pinchers, eight tiny legs, flat-jointed body and long tapering tail can bring, has a clumsy way of tumbling down from rafters, and a very unjust habit of tail-spiking the first object to interrupt its fall. Not only this, but it invariably chooses the night for its performance.

In Mexico, the sting of a scorpion is regarded as deadly. Prompt attention by an able physician who is especially equipped for the emergency is believed the only salvation; otherwise the victim dies within a few hours. For this reason, and for others more apparent, we rather welcomed the mosquito-bar draperies over the beds; and, despite the pillows—undentable, neck-breaking head-props—sleep whizzed us through to breakfast.

We breakfasted in the patio amid potted trees, and accepted the customary service, sugar-coated buns called *pan dulce*, and hot milk flavoured with the thick, black essence of coffee. On asking for butter and eggs, we were surprised at obtaining them. The eggs were fresh; the butter, imported, I think, from Texas, but still within the law—the law, I mean, that tends toward the survival of the strong.

The ride from Colima to Guadalajara proved somewhat less picturesque than our journey of the previous day, pine forests and grizzly mountain scenes giving way to cultivation—the first striking evidence of it we had seen on the west coast. There were orchards of banana and orange trees and great square tracts of

cane and corn, these not confined to the level areas, but stretching far up over the steep slopes of prominent ranges. Brush fences, so prevalent in other parts, were supplanted here by low walls of rock—miles and miles of them, and no such a thing as the ugly posts and barbed wire which characterize nearly all rural districts of the United States.

It was not late in the afternoon when we pulled into the city of Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco State and second city, rivalled by none, of the Republic. Although it was founded in the middle of the sixteenth century and regrets the fact that its great commercial potentialities are, for the stranger, shadowed “by the curious old-world quaintness of the city and by the never-failing sunlight,” for me the shadows fell from a different source; and though conscious of the sunlight, obviously there, I was more conscious of a concentrated reflection from an omnipotent peso. The town seemed too modernized actually to exist as a part of Mexico.

It boasted that its quaint offices, where clerks on high stools wore away their eyesight and most of their chin whiskers on dusty ledgers, gave “no hint of the magnitude of transactions done within them,” and exemplified this with a casual nod toward the achievement of a local firm which recorded a year’s profit, through simple trade, of six hundred thousand pesos. It estimated its industrial capital investment at thirty millions of dollars, there being in the State more than a hundred distilleries, an equal number of soap factories, of shoe factories, of hosiery factories and of tanneries; there being great sugar and flour mills, brick plants, tile plants, ice plants, brass and iron foundries, breweries, fruit canneries; there being great

establishments for cotton-weaving, for the bottling of mineral waters, the making of matches, candles, glue, chocolate, sweetmeats and a dozen or more other products, all controlled by . . . "the Chicago of Mexico," as it likes to call itself.

"And all this," thinks Guadalajara, "I am hiding in a dream of loveliness."

And indeed, in your way of thinking, Guadalajara, you do not flatter yourself; for you boast further of an electric tramway, of a thousand privately-owned automobiles, of paved streets lined with handsome shops, of telephone and electric-light facilities, of several banking firms, of a population of one hundred and seventy thousand, as well as several hotels under American management and several more comparable to any hotel of Europe. This latter, I think, an excellent comparison. You are a piece of Europe with a fence around it; and, through your hungry gates, stroll people of all nationalities. You are a piece of Europe, robbed of its old self, glorying in the new that comes with the personally conducted tours of globe-trotters—busy, dizzy see-it-alls that gush and make hodge-podge travel records in the pattern of a crazy quilt all over their trunks and bags.

"Oh, haven't you seen the Government Building and the palace? Heavens! You mustn't miss them. And the little Niagara of Juanacatlan, or however you pronounce it. And Lake Chapala! Here—here's a postcard of it. Everybody goes there! And you must stroll down Lafayette Avenue. You have no idea! And don't forget to see the bullet holes in the wall by the waterworks, where seven—or seven hundred Americans [Really I've forgotten how many. Isn't it awful?] were shot by Villa! And to think! Here

we are ! Sometimes I wonder. . . . Well ! I must skip along now to see that interesting old relic—mission or something of the sort—called Guadalupe. What *would* they say if I got home after coming all this way and had missed that ? *Adios, amigo*, see you to-morrow ! ”

That’s the kind of place it is. You meet the *folks*. You feel yourself becoming one of them. You become less sympathetic than they. You think of the deserts, the tangled wildernesses, the uninhabited islands, little towns like San Blas, tiny villages such as Navarrete on the old Spanish road ; and you long now to get back.

But Guadalajara, in this respect like Manzanillo, has suffered from other causes. Probably the most unsympathetic traveller to enter the city was the internationally famed bandit, or patriot, Villa. He came to “ do the town.” He did it thoroughly. With his great *machete*, he cut his initials everywhere and punctuated them with rifle bullets. He took souvenirs. He tore doors from their casings to procure the metal of hinges and screws, broke windows to hear the smash. He visited the richest haciendas, and what he could not kill, he carried away. American blood, together with that of other foreign peoples, was spilled with the Mexican. This was about ten years ago, but ten times that shall pass before Guadalajara shall forget “ the General.” Indeed my friends the *folks* are mild in comparison. The broadminded city, cosmopolitan in every respect, welcomes them all.

Hotels for this reason are exceptionally good. They are of American plan, European ideas and Mexican specifications. Like houses built for sale by real estate men in our enterprising cities, they are supposed

to suit anyone. I wouldn't be at all surprised if ice-water could be had for the asking. One of our party succeeded actually in securing a room and bath. It was necessary to walk into the plaza, to see blackshawled, coughing women, amid the buzz of insects, selling their deadly dainties, or groups of others with crosses painted upon their foreheads, kneeling upon the church steps, to appreciate the fact that Mexico was anything more than a passing dream.

A ride into what was called the beautiful residential district was no revelation. There was some satisfaction in going part way there by horse-car and returning behind a raw-boned mare, but "the beautiful residential district" was horrible. Here was Mary Pickford's house, there lived Mr. Jones; and, across the street, some king of "North Pole Tarts" was building a palace next door to the duke of "Tortoise Shell Glasses." Yet there were Mexicans here as well—lots of them. In type their houses were French colonial, Georgian, Pompeiian, English cottage or a nondescript architecture with whipped-cream dressing, having great show of garden in front and visible clothes-lines behind. *Mexico!* Where in hell was it?

"Ah!" smiled our cab-driver, laying a heavy whip over the back of his bony horse, "you desire to see some beautiful residences of old Aztec and Spanish design! *Bueno, señor!* You shall see the old American Colony near the water plant. Many Americans there. . . ." He broke off with a meaning grin. "Many! . . . before Villa."

And, after a long drive, we came upon something that resembled a section of Hollywood, though happily less extravagant in expression of "ideas" and vastly more substantial. The Americans here had been

responsible for a bit of Mexico in an otherwise conglomerate city; and it was more so to-day, however sinister the cause, now that the original inhabitants were gone. Dark-skinned families, some evidently poor, had taken possession. Gardens were overgrown with wild shrubbery and weeds, walls were peeling, crumbling, and everything in general, strewn with rubbish. Only the outline remained of a happy existence . . . before Villa.

It is strange—the topsy-turvy condition of things. A Mexican returns from his travels in the United States and builds, for personal distinction—geographic or climatic fitness may go hang—an American house; the American returns from Mexico and builds, for the same reason and with a like go-hangedness, a Mexican house. It is fair exchange, but rather deplorable in the eyes of the foreigner. In one’s own country one seldom resents alien influence. The variety is refreshing. But in other lands, any deviation from the typical is apt to be depressing.

In a remote section of the city, once the town of San Pedro, but now incorporated, we visited manufacturers of pottery. Naturally I expected to see several designs of Aztec china with its Egyptian-like patterns of stiff intricacy, types of *ollas* and various articles fashioned from the dull black sacrifice stone. There was, in fact, plenty of this. It was sold chiefly to tourists. Many of them called here, as we did, the cab or automobile drivers receiving, no doubt, their commissions on sales. To-day, however, these establishments could not exist on tourist trade alone. Consequently Mexican patronage was not overlooked; and there was no small supply of Grecian urns, of Florentine lions, of Dying Gladiators or of seven or

eight species of Venus with September Morn thrown in to carry out the general idea.

We had come to Guadalajara merely for the sake of perspective, and found it good. We had penetrated rather close to the heart of things; but the soul of them, we thought, lay behind. Guadalajara is a beautiful city—beautiful on the face of it; but, to me, it seemed all face. Its charm of personality was owned, rather than radiated.

At all events we had strayed far enough from our first-intended fields of travel, and were glad, several days later, to turn back again. We shook the dust of Manzanillo from our boots, got into our sea-going togs, signed a half-dozen clearance papers, and made at last for the open sea.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AMPHIBIOUS YACHT

DURING the *Velero's* construction in the William Muller yards in Los Angeles Harbour, several Atlantic Coast ship-designers called to inspect her. Later at the yacht club they complained, having found at the plant no evidence of "yacht-building" whatever. They admitted some notice of an embryonic hull; but this, they held, comprised timbers of proportion and strength comparable only to an "Arctic ice-cracker." Surely *that* wasn't the one!

It was. In type, no doubt, she was not of the builder's choice; but as for the lines of her bottom and the weight of her skeleton, nothing could have suited him more. He told the owner:

"She'll hold together against anything you'll ever meet, except—and I warn you, Captain—except *she's not built for cruising overland!* Not her. No. Nor any yacht ever launched!"

He didn't know his own child. The blamed thing was amphibious.

Northward from Manzanillo, along the west coast of Mexico, are hundreds of labyrinthine lagoons or esteros, some quite extensive and several navigable even for a vessel like the *Velero* with more than eight feet draught. The channels being as treacherous as accurate charts are unobtainable, it would seem wise, on entering such waters for the first time, to employ

some native as pilot. One of these had been recommended to us. Our return to Mazatlan was, in part, to take him aboard; and so it was, after a night's run southward, that he stood squinting into the early sun, seeking the outlet of a certain large lagoon called Boca Tecapan.

Alone with him and a quartermaster on the bridge, I was growing rather anxious. We had had daylight for more than an hour. We were to have raised the entrance more than an hour ago. According to the pilot's whim, I had retraced our former wake for more than seven miles, and, according to its reaction, returned again. I had stood the vessel in as close as I dared; but, as he continued to frown over the breakers at the low monotony of jungle beyond, I concluded that his landmark must have been carved with a *machete* in the trunk of some tree. I handed him my binoculars. They interested him, but their use was a mystery. He returned them, shrugged his narrow shoulders, and, for the third time, decided that we should turn back.

I refused. We had patrolled his condemned beat long enough and were farther into the green water and higher ground-swells than my responsibility as second mate warranted. Consequently I resorted to the telephone. The skipper, responding, came immediately upon deck and took charge. He stood us out several miles, emphatically refused hauling northward again, and prepared his sextant and tables for a long chance at the low sun. But he was not given time to complete computations. The pilot had flared with such sudden and unexpected light of intelligence that I scarcely recognized the same man.

"Boca Tecapan?" I asked.

His reply was a rapid-fire enfilade of "*si-si's*."

Before the rise of the ocean breeze, maybe the place would have been discernible; but now such a chop was stirring that breakers of the bar, if indeed we approached them, were one with the deep water beyond and the channel within. The pilot pointed:

"*Aquí! Aquí, señor! Aquí!*"

Two whales rose several points off our port bow, at which he displayed such apoplectic elation that I retreated for fear of his embrace. Allan, having noticed the excitement, had called Joe, the interpreter, from his wireless set, and was demanding now a prompt explanation.

Briefly, it was this: Whenever you sight those particular whales, you have found the proper channel to Boca Tecapan!

Our phenomenal pilot was bent, now that we had the opportunity, on heading directly for them. Had Allan heeded the advice, either this account would contain something of a sensational melodrama with breakers pounding a climax down the hatches, or it would never have been written at all. The whales, no doubt, were in the channel; but, as we were to discover, there lay, between them and the *Velero*, water about two feet deep.

At any rate there was a channel and a will to find it. The Mexican, the doctor and I went ahead in the launch, making preliminary surveys and signalling the yacht our findings. Once by a slight misguess in groping, we picked up a milky green wave that frothed at our gunwales, scudded us along before it with a sickening yaw, but fortunately passed on and did not break until some distance beyond. Once again, with our lead line registering a safe two fathoms, we were

startled by the abrupt appearance of bottom ! Rock ? volcano ? sea-monster ? We didn't know which. We couldn't see. Everything turned white. There was a roar, a tumbling of water, an odour, a terrific, sickening odour.

The pilot said it was *muy bueno*. We were in the channel again ; and one of his playful little friends, a spouting whale, had come to tell us about it. We didn't enjoy the breath, but then—harmless little babies they were, only about twice the length of our launch. They offered no objections to our manœuvres, though these, at the moment, were rather erratic. Agreeing at length on certain bearings, we reported back to the *Velero* which followed us thence a mile or so through the narrow pass and into the calm estero.

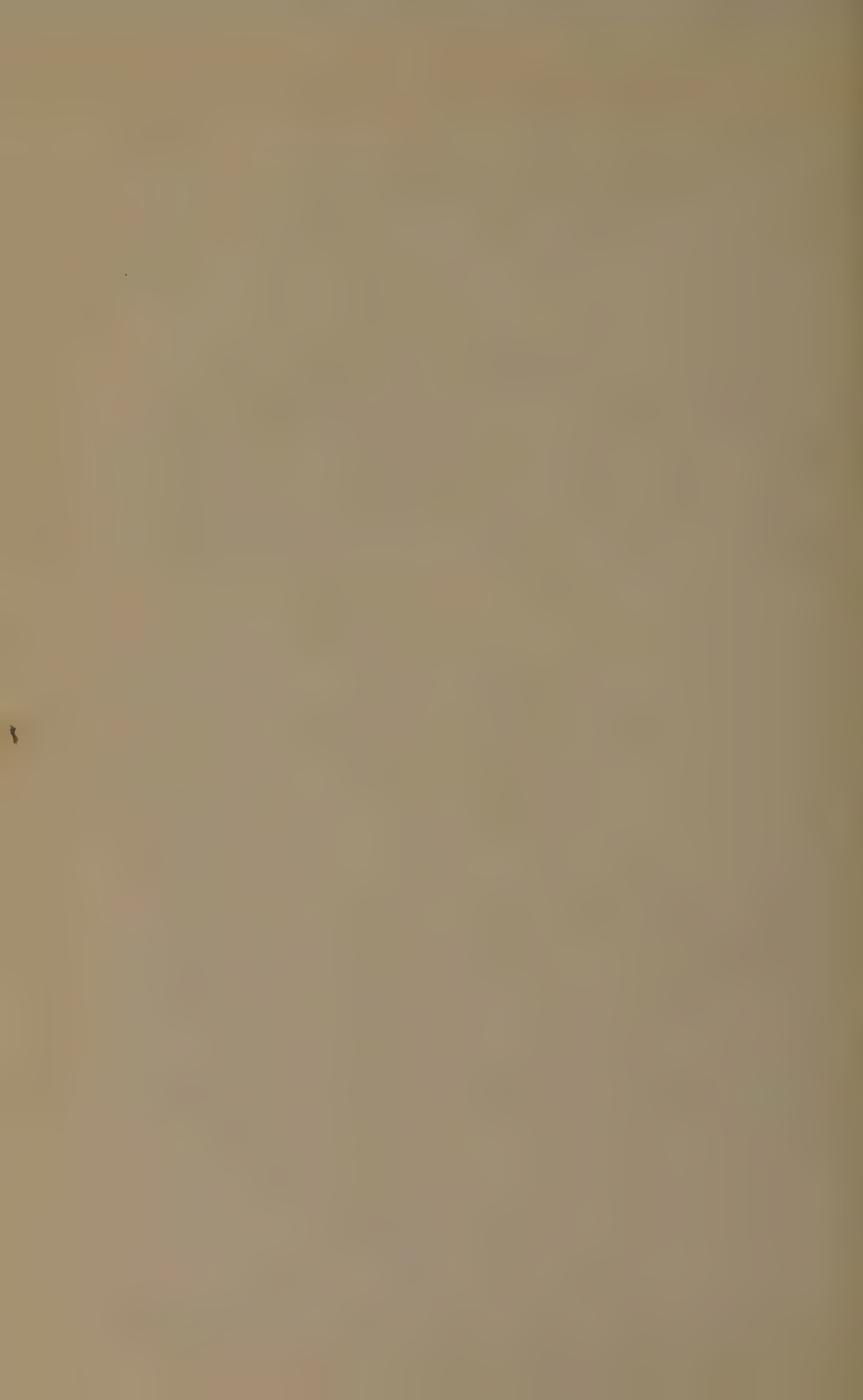
Here the Mexican informed us that his duties as pilot were at an end. His capacity lay in locating the channel we had passed. Of the lagoon, he knew very little. (Possibly it was because there were no more whales to guide him, and alligators couldn't be trusted.) He suggested that we call at the Indian village of Palmita, a short distance upstream, where he had a friend who knew the winding ways of the estero like a book. What he knew about books, we feared to ask, but stopped accordingly at the village.

Our appearance aroused most of the population. Mothers and fathers together with their sisters and their cousins and their aunts swarmed on the sandy beach or made for us in their dugouts. In great jabbering herds they came aboard, peered into all the cabins, stared down into the engine-room, tried the upholstery in the main saloon and entertained themselves with the phonograph.

Phonographs are not unheard of even in the most



"VELERO II." AGROUND IN BOCA TECAPAN



remote settlements of Mexico. I have seen wattle-huts containing not one stick of furniture save a little oak box perched upon an oil-can with its several records resting on the floor. Phonographs and sewing-machines—the noisiest kinds made—are the standard luxuries of the poor. Mexicans sell their souls for them, just as Americans do for automobiles. I saw very recently in my own city a little “dollar-down” bungalow with its portable garage housing a glittering sedan of a make second only to the most costly in America. These Indian people of Mexico that buy phonographs—poor foolish souls, what more could be expected of them? Sometimes one wonders. Sometimes one thinks, but very seldom.

Palmita, on going ashore, reminded us of the settlements along the old Spanish road to Tepic, though here the dwellings were often somewhat less squalid. Many houses, heavily thatched with grass, had solid walls of adobe and yards accurately defined by stockades. Of course the pig was kept in the parlour and the baby allowed to wallow in the mud, while the pestiferous gnats took their choice of tenderloin.

I made the acquaintance of several happy families through the talismanic phrase of “*Muy bonito!*” which took me into their separate dwellings, introduced me to the dog, the parrot and the baby, and again to the art of making *tortillas*.

As a rule children in Mexico do not play; but here I noticed positive evidence of it. The *señora* of the house showed us a toy dugout about two feet long, and another something more than three times the dimensions, each a perfect model of the kind that daddy made. These, she said, her *hombrecito*, aged twelve, had hewn

from solid logs of hardwood. The larger one, sufficient to hold the boy's weight, he sometimes dragged down to the beach, launched and paddled out into deep water. She was proud of that little fellow; but *this* one—and she pointed with mixed pity and scorn to a sickly little tot with vacant staring eyes—this one *po-o-o-brecito*, would be better off with God !

Most of the young women of the town were too busy to afford us their company. They came and went to and from a well near the beach, carrying heavy red *ollas* upon their heads. The men in the streets, every one idle, seemed rather sullen. I managed a conversation, such as it was, with only one of them; and, upon offering him some American tobacco, was interested to watch him as he jerked a corn husk from his belt, bit square corners at either end, fixed the tobacco within and rolled a cigarette. All of them carried *machetes*. Several of them were quite drunk—something quite exceptional, contrary to all of my earlier notions. There is, I am sure, far less drunkenness in Mexico than across her northern borders, where Prohibition puts many a good man that much closer to gaol.

We pulled out from Palmita with another pilot and several of his "confidential advisers"; and, waving good-bye, sounded a salute upon our whistle. In this country, if one has access to anything that will make a noise, it is sacrilege not to use it. For instance, there may be—I've seen it—five steamers in a single port, one of which, very early in the morning, perhaps, decides to clear. Her anchors a-weigh, she sounds three whistles, prolonging the third indefinitely. The salute is promptly acknowledged by one blast from every vessel capable of letting off steam; otherwise

the fog-horn serves the purpose with a vengeance. If there are any whistles ashore, these sometimes join the chorus. And that's only the start of it. They have merely extended a courtesy. They have yet to return the compliment. In careful succession, therefore, each of the four ships at anchor blares out the three-blast salute. Factories, if such there be, may do likewise. "There!" you think, hitting your pillow a vicious swat and drawing a sheet up over your face to discourage the gnats. "That's over." But you're wrong. The departing vessel has received the maritime blessing of four ships and perhaps several factories. It is only proper that she acknowledge receipt of same. So she whistles four plus perhaps several times; and, if after her last dying toot there remains sufficient pressure in her boilers to continue on her way, she steams out of the harbour.

Palmita vanished from sight as the *Velero* took a branch channel to starboard, followed on to port, branched again here and turned again there until we were lost. But then, why worry? We had five or six pilots aboard who knew all about the channels. We had begun to trust them, and, between the mangrove hedges, ploughed on at full speed.

Wild duck and snipe flew everywhere. Often we met our old friends, the giant crane, white ibis and heron. Sometimes, creeping slowly down from banks of mud, an alligator splashed into the water and vanished below. Silver-grey were the ripples in the twinkle of shadow and tinsel light; and we could have sailed on, it seemed, forever. We could have severed all ties of love, like the lotus-eaters—all but those that lurked beyond the turns and beckoned us to follow; for these must have been the Sirens known to Ulysses.

Even our pilots and all their hangers-on were caught by the spell; and in the course of several tiptoe hours, we went too far, took one turn too many and came blinking to our senses with a sudden shock as of an earthquake.

There came a churning of muddy water, an angry grumbling from below and a deep vibration that shook us from truck to keelson. The mangroves ceased to move by. We were fast in the mud; and a more unfortunate time could not have been given us by the joint conspiracy of all the evil fates. The day marked one of the highest tides of the year. This was the highest tide of the day. Our motors were full-speed astern, but budging us not one inch. Pilot Number One stroked his scanty two-part moustache and grinned. Number Two joined his confidential advisers and, with them, strolled away.

I glanced down at the water and noticed, by the movement of drifting particles, that the tide was still in flood, and pointed to the fact in the presence of Captain T——.

"No!" he objected. "Ebb."

Ebb! What the deuce did he mean? I could see the flow. But he squinted at me with his deep-sea squint and smiled.

"Coming in well and proper," he observed. "*And . . . falling.*"

Still squinting, he lit his pipe, evidently anticipating my challenge; but Allan called me at that moment; and during the next half-hour we were chugging about in the launch, making rough surveys of our surroundings. It appeared that the yacht had slid her entire length upon the flat, and that navigable water was everywhere else about her. Allan remarked

that there was yet hope of clearing with this tide; for he noticed, as I had noticed, that the water was running in. I quoted our deep-water oracle on the subject; but we both agreed that he was wrong. During this time, however, the retired ship's master had procured a long boat-hook and driven it down into the mud. Before witnesses, he had marked the present level of the water. About four o'clock that afternoon, while a current continued swiftly in the direction of a rising tide, a drop was registered of one foot. The yacht was listing.

The phenomenon seemed curious, to say the least. Every drop of water within the narrow branch was flowing in, but, at the same time, it was growing shallower every minute. The explanation, as I received it from Captain T——, was this: The estero, with all of its branches affected by the same tide, might be regarded as a single body of water. This body, influenced not only by the present ebb but also by the momentum of the former flow, would be subject to two opposing currents, the greater (since obviously the water was falling) running out and the lesser, evidently confined to the surface, running in. In deep water both currents would exist. In shallow, there would remain only the upper, the inflowing one. We were isolated in such a place. Later we were to see the water rising and flowing out, due to a reverse action: a greater influx than outflux throughout the lagoon, but only the outflux here in the shoal branch of it.

This was the solution, given here as accurately as I recall it, though at the time few of us were in the mood to bother with physical geography. We had been wrestling with heavy anchors, chains, lines, launches,

lifeboats, skiffs, making every preparation for the next high tide due about midnight. We intended warping her on over the flat and returning by another channel; but now there was nothing more to do for many hours.

We were enjoying a strange reaction that affected us as strong drink. We were being eaten alive by gnats and had only to look forward to more gnats and a long sleepless night. All this seemed to add to our giddiness as did the nature of the *Velero's* list. She lay careened at an angle of nearly thirty degrees by actual registration, her lower portholes at the water's edge, her uppers gaping at the stars. Several chairs had capsized of their own accord. Walking from place to place had nothing to do with "sea legs." With the motion of a ship one soon learns what to expect, but here we kept expecting what could not happen. Her list, being permanent, had us staggering, stumbling and sometimes toppling over. Not only did it seem that we were dizzy, but we actually became so. Climbing up the winding stairs from the main saloon was to walk for a time on a succession of level-topped ruts, then to climb the remaining distance, which became almost perpendicular, on hands and knees, using the banister spindles as ladder rungs.

At dinner the table was practically useless. Many of us found it more practical, literally, to sit on the floor and let our feet hang down. The cook with a tureen of broth, got only as far as the galley door, then went back for the mop. Joe, vowing to stick by the table if he had to lash himself there, had the pleasure of seeing his plate go scooting off into someone's lap. The skipper ordered the cloth "wet down"; but before he could get a stranglehold on the roast, it went

skidding off the platter and did not stop until it struck the lower bulkhead. It paid to sit in that portion of the saloon.

Shortly before midnight—the *Velero* being back to her level keel—all hands but the cook turned to. The engines were started, and the control moved to full speed ahead. The anchors lay two hundred feet or more before us; and, by grinding in chain, we hoped to drag her on over the flat. All dragging, however, was confined to the anchor flukes through the mud. The vessel did not budge. We commandeered all the heavy line aboard, which was paid out to several of us in the small boat as we took one end ashore and made it fast to trees. It sounds easy now. Then it was not. No light from the moon could penetrate the mangroves. It was pitch black when we made our way through them. Several times they gave way with our weight, and we splashed down among alligators—imaginary ones, perhaps, but there was no realism lacking in the entanglement of roots that caught and attempted to hold us down in the inky water. The task accomplished, the tide was falling again. We were left to wait until noon of the following day.

Had we failed at that time we might have been stranded for months; but, by means of the line ashore and the midship windlass, a grip on two anchors with all the power of the capstan, and both engines hooked on at full speed, she began to move—inch by inch, at first; then a foot, and another until, with both hooks rising toward their hawse pipes, she gave a sudden lunge. A peon in the skiff, caught under the gangway, was swamped immediately. Several of us in the launch picked up the pieces, but the *Velero*, cutting loose with intentions to take full advantage of the high

water, leapt on and did not stop. We received word by megaphone to come when we could as best we knew how. They'd meet us at Palmita Village.

We obeyed, but they failed to keep their promise. They had climbed over one mud flat, grazed another and lodged in a third. We found them late in the evening, waiting for the tide to rise; and, not until after midnight, with our capable pilots discharged and sent back to Palmita, were we able to plough on over the mud and gain the basin near the outlet.

Here in the early morning, our overland experiences led us close to disaster. We had come upon heavy groundswells in the channel. High breaking seas were on either beam. Allan, who chose always to rely upon only himself in case of possible danger, had dismissed even the wheelman from duty. Rounding a low spit, he had the helm hard over. No response. We were swinging slowly in an opposite direction. We were making for the bar. And we struck.

It was the kind of a thump that takes the heart out of one; and then the suspense. . . . A long green sea snatched us up and rolled under. Down we came again. *Crash!*—not a graze, but a fair landing. We were down this time, I thought, to stay; but a breaker piled up astern, dived under and bore us on. The next one, I was sure, would end her; but it proved only a minor jolt. We had been snatched by another current, tumbled back into deeper water; and now, despite all the opposite wheel that Allan could give her, she was bent for the beach and the surf. Instinctively the skipper reached for the control, but, before he could draw it back, another friendly eddy seized her forefoot, whisked her over into the channel and followed her on to safety.

Later investigation showed only minor damage. One propeller blade was dented slightly, causing heavier vibrations. Otherwise we had been lucky. By several of our friends in Mazatlan she was dubbed, "The Overland Limited"; but the local newspaper had ideas of its own. No American yacht would go poking her nose into so many out-of-the-way places without good reason. *Por ultimo!* We were discovered!

CHAPTER IX

SLEUTHS AND FOREIGN ENTANGLEMENTS

OUR return to Mazatlan brought forth a startling account in the local journal, *El Demócrata*. It is quoted here, word for word, and letter for letter, as its translation was given us. Headed, "*The Mysterious Ship Has Been Rocking in the Waters of this Bay Since Yesterday,*" it goes on:—

Are on board the *Velero II* traveling the four American detectives in charge of locating the beautiful American Artist Clara Phillips?

Yesterday morning it casted anchor in this bay the North American Yacht *Velero II* a graceful craft of the type of the torpedo boats and which Yacht has already visited Mazatlan some weeks ago.

When the *Velero II* came to this port, for the first time, it was kept an absolute secret regarding the persons that were traveling on board, and it was only said to one of our reporters that the Yacht was commanded directly by its owner, an American millionaire who was traveling along the West Coast on a pleasure trip.

We recently published in *El Demócrata Sinaloense*, Is the actress Clara Phillips, authoress of a horrid crime, hidden in Sinaloa? and when treating this matter, we expressed our suspicions that on the

Velero II were four detectives from Los Angeles, Cal., commissioned to locate the beautiful Artist Phillips, who was successful in penetrating into Mexican territory shortly after having escaped from the jail of that Yankee City.

The Enigmatic Ship

Data posterior to the departure of the *Velero II* and which data was casually gathered by one of our editors was the cause of our suspicions. It would not have been any thing particular that knowing that Clara Phillips was found in Mexican territory, the American detectives from Los Angeles were looking here for her. And it was still more natural that being as it was a secret commission that corresponding secret was kept, above all with the news paper people, whose indiscretion in making public the presence of these four detectives would have spoiled perhaps some well previously prepared plans.

We admitted in that occasion, the supposition that Clara Phillips, the beautiful murderer was found in Sinaloan territory and in order to strengthen our supposition we referred to the short sojourn of the actress in the border city of Mexicali, Lower California, and her trip from this port to the Capitol of the State of Sonora.

The presence again of the *Velero II* in the bay of Mazatlan almost confirms our suspicions. Why do they kept it a secret that the real object of this small craft, rocking over the surface of the water it seems to us a great interrogation mark? If really the owner of the vessel is a Yankee Millionaire who likes to travel by sea, why did he

wish to return to this port and not continue his pleasure trip down the Southern seas of the Pacific, as we were told at first? Oh, everlasting curiosity of the news-people! How many a plan we have perhaps spoiled with only an indiscrete information.

The Man of the Pipe

One of our reporters was yesterday looking from the wharf the gray silhouette of the *Velero II*, the inigmatic and mysterious ship, crossways against the current as it was found, was continually changing position. Little after mid-day, a graceful motor-boat left one of the sides of the vessel and came toward the wharf. Our reporter was naturally attentive to the arrival of the motor-boat in order to see who was coming on board. A few minutes after, as agile as a 15 year old boy jumped out an American gentleman of heavy constitution and elligantly dressed. He had between his lips a pipe from which bluish spirals of smoke came out.

To interview that man would have been as much as to force the Sphynx to disclose her secret. Our reporter saw how that man walked down with rapid strides along Arsenal street.

Having read this, it was difficult to realize that now all of our "well previously prepared plans" were smashed into a cocked hat. No doubt Clara, "the beautiful murderer" whom we had tracked from desert islands to the wilds of Tecapan, had gathered "casually" this "indiscrete information" and foiled us again.



AN OLD PART OF MAZATLAN

The doctor (we had called him "Arch" instead of "Watson" for the sake of disguise) met my sullen mood with silence as together we stood on deck and gazed shoreward. For us the place, once a city of warm hopes with laurels of achievement almost within reach, was now overshadowed by clouds—black clouds precipitating ignominious defeat. They hung over the twin spires of the old church, darkened the pink and blue of low adobes and robbed the flicker of light from the tufted palms as our eyes coasted over the dull-tiled panorama of Mazatlan. Arch shrugged. He was something of a philosopher. Sorrows, he mused, were like rats in a trap; they should be drowned. So we hailed a dugout, and it was not long before we, very Sphynx-like, were walking "down with rapid strides along Arsenal Street."

Mazatlan, probably the most important city on the coast from San Diego to Panama, having a population of more than twenty thousand and exports second to the largest of the whole Republic, breathes somewhat the atmosphere of Guadalajara. It is not untinged by outside influences. At the time of our call, while there were few if any tourists in the town, several dozen foreigners—Americans, English, French and German—were nursing various enterprises through the uncertainties of reconstruction, awaiting the time when the central Government should prove its stability, and when one small dredger might create a harbour rivalled by few on the Pacific Coast.

At present, it seemed, neither the Government nor harbour held any great inducements for trade. Taxes and certain constitutional amendments were often prohibitive; the harbour was one large shoal. For vessels of any size there was protection only against

north-westerly winds; holding ground was poor, and, save for a small-boat landing near the Customs House, there were no suggestions of docks whatever. All goods transported by sea were loaded or discharged by way of barges. This—when Mazatlan is supposed to be the outlet for some of the richest mining districts of Mexico.

The city proper, however, is more progressive. There is a very adequate electric light plant, a sewerage system and considerable regard for sanitation through a board of health. There are public schools, civil and military hospitals; in some sections, large and commodious buildings and paved streets. There are no tramways, but the place fairly crawls with other transportation facilities.

Arch and I, stopping on the sidewalk for a chat with a former acquaintance, were attacked from all quarters by "seagoing hacks." They came in such numbers that burro and "flivver" traffic was nearly blocked. The drivers, each soliciting our patronage, held up their fingers, and hissed. In Mexico, one soon grows accustomed to being hissed at; and no offence is taken. It is simply a means of calling your attention. *Pss-ss-sst!* You'd imagine yourself in a jungle of wary serpents.

And speaking of serpents, they're not always confined to the jungles. There is a certain hotel, fronting upon a broad boulevard, a beach and the open sea; and here, arriving at last and accepting the manager's hospitality in the form of his famous "Irish Rose cocktail," we asked for the "house cat." The "house cat" is well known. It attains a length, sometimes, of about eighteen feet, its variable dimensions depending upon the number of rats it has consumed. The

manager informed us that now it was very short and fat, several days ago having overstepped its authority as "cat" and devoured a large dog. A tame deer of the hotel, strangely addicted to chewing-tobacco and known to wander from room to room in order to get it, was believed in grave danger of its life. The "house cat's" mouth appeared diminutive enough, but it had a way of stretching. The playful pet, able to expand or contract any part of its anatomy to suit the occasion, could draw itself over its victim as a small stocking over a large foot. The "house cat" belonged to the species *boa constrictor*.

As we found it this time, coiled neatly among boxes and barrels in the patio, it was in rather a slothful state, but managed to hiss furiously upon our approach; and it was with no little hesitation that one of the house boys, after the flat refusal of another to go within a yard of the thing, dragged the creature out. Had it been hungry, none would have dared trifle. Eleven or twelve feet, as it measured now, may be comparatively short for a *boa constrictor*, but there is strength there—strength sufficient to break from a man's grasp, knock him down with a single thrust of its head and . . . perhaps in the case of a man, the attack would end about there. I don't know; but I believe, at least, that children might do well to see that the reptile is never allowed to go hungry; and parents, that their bills are paid on time.

Besides the deer and the snake, there are other novel attractions in the establishment. One looks for these in the bar; and, what may be more surprising, one sees them before taking a drink. They are domesticated spiders. Their bodies are fat, fuzzy and underslung with respect to their high elbows or

knees. Just as rat-catching has been assigned to the boa constrictor, fly-catching is the duty of the spiders. The doctor, always interested in such things, remained there with his foot upon the brass rail for hours, watching them; while I, for the sake of scientific research, kept him company.

That night we were to attend a dance given by one of the influential families of Mazatlan; and although I did not relish the nature of the affair, I was glad of the opportunity to take part, having been advised very confidentially by an American resident of the city that social customs here were as foreign from our own as lemonade from tequila.

"Several years ago in Mexico City," he said, "I lived for a few weeks with a very proud old Mexican family. There was a young girl in the house. I don't suppose she was more than sixteen. She looked that, so I fancy she was really younger. You never can tell about these Mexican women. At any rate, she was a pert saucy little tike; and it wasn't long before we were on chatty terms, though always under the watchful eye of some older member of the family. Down here, you know, they'll chaperon a girl from the cradle to the altar. I've known of several cases where a young woman, in order to have a private word with her suitor, would let down a telephone from her bedroom to some *hombre* on the sidewalk, and talk that way by the hour. Nothing like that in my case, though, and after all she was only a kid.

"When I left them, I sent, in token of my appreciation, a bouquet of red roses. Now I didn't address it to the *señorita*, mind you, but to her mother.

"Three months later I was back again in the city. I met several of our mutual friends, all but one of whom

refused even to recognize me; and the exception was a bit frosty to say the least. I asked him what the deuce was wrong.

“ ‘Do you pretend, sir,’ said he, ‘to profess ignorance?’ ”

“I did. In my past conduct I could account for nothing to warrant such treatment.

“ ‘*Treatment!* . . . To propose to a young lady; to follow that proposal by utter neglect of her and her family’s good name; to disappear, as from the earth, and then . . . Well, sir,’ said he, ‘it happened that there were those of us who knew you as a married man! *Treatment*, you say. What kind of treatment was that?’ ”

My American friend tossed aside his cigarette, smiled and shook his head.

“You can imagine,” he resumed quietly, “how this struck me. But, to make a long story short, I refer again to the red roses. They were—though naturally I didn’t know of it then—of a very particular and significant variety. I had addressed them, you’ll remember, to the *señora*; but, it seemed, this much of it was attributed to a slip of the pen in the abbreviation of title. Roses like those were never sent to married women. Unheard of. Therefore they were transferred to the girl. Her acceptance of them, or you can shoot me for a liar, sealed the contract of our betrothal!

“They went ahead with preparations for an early wedding, not stopping until it was discovered that I was already married, and had been, very much so, for some years. My apologies were very slow in being accepted, and only on the strength of the card addressed to the *señora* (lucky they hadn’t lost it!) were they

accepted at all. It was no laughing matter. You've got to watch your step. And remember this: if you ask a girl to dance with you for the third time, it is the same as saying, 'Will you marry me?' If she dances, it's as if she replied, 'Go to father!'"

As it happened that night, however, our hostess was less exacting. She put us immediately at ease, and made allowances, I'm sure, for our innocent liberties. The dance was held at the old family mansion in a stately but typical *sala*, having floors of cold white tile, and walls bare and lofty interrupted by numerous doors that swung rather carelessly into numerous boudoirs. The furniture, comprising heavy plush chairs and settees, and tables with marble tops, had evidently been imported many years ago from Germany. In the patio, screened behind a thin adornment of palm leaves, a great orchestra, of perhaps a dozen pieces, boomed forth often with such American airs as, "Three o'Clock in the Morning," a waltz very popular in Mexico at the time.

Before a half-hour had passed that night, had it not been for the graceful tolerance of certain guests, I should, no doubt, have been married, divorced and challenged to seven duels. When the dance started, for example, what did I do but start to dance! Imagine such a thing! The young lady, suffering this ribald offence, blushed as crimson as the roses that she wore at her corsage. Probably those roses meant something or other; but that wasn't the point. I'd have *him* to settle with later; right now, it seemed, one didn't dance. One walked. This way. And I found myself promenading about the floor at the side of my partner—the wrong side, of course. I shifted over and tried again; but by this time the parade was over. One

didn't walk. One danced. One was obliged, when one tossed one's cap in the ring, to see the game to its bitter end.

I didn't know at the time just how bitter an end could be. When the music stopped, I was deluding myself by the idea that the worst was over; and, taking a seat beside my long-suffering partner . . .

Taking a seat beside her! What! You must have been beside yourself! (Gasps and whistles!)

But that was exactly what I did, noticing at the moment that a group of men, standing off in a far corner, were attempting to conceal the fact that they had been staring at me. I cudgelled my tired brain. There had been only one dance; I was safe on that score. She wore red roses, but Heaven knew I was not the donor. Then came a horrible thought. I had danced with the woman, counting encores, *more* than three times. My heart missed a beat, then started throbbing away like a centrifugal pump. But nonsense! People didn't work as fast as that in Mexico; and, as I shied a glance at my partner, the truth dawned.

Carajos! It was conduct unbecoming anything but a lubberly sea cook. I was on the wrong side again. On either hand I could see nothing but bare arms, fans, bracelets, dingle-dangles and feminine ankles. I leapt to my feet, apologized profusely, received a gracious response and, evaporating as promptly as possible, materialized among the coat-tails in the far corner.

Inwardly sighing, I guessed now that I was learning the ways of things. One had only to get the swing of it, as it were. There seemed to be no objections to my presence here; but, at that moment, I caught

the eye of my old shipmate, Joe, peering anxiously from behind the staircase. He seemed deeply concerned; and I was not surprised to see him step out and slip cautiously over to my side. What he told me was in an undertone.

I was guilty now, not only of another *faux pas*, but of gross deception. I was being false to my lawful wife; and, what was nearly as bad, I was masquerading before all this lovely innocence as a bachelor. There was a place here for everyone, Joe told me. Married men were behind the staircase.

It was fair time to surrender, anyhow, and I managed to escape without further notice. In Mexico, to be married, is to do like the "Snark" of the nonsense rhymes, which strange animal, chancing to be a "Boojem," is obliged slowly and silently to vanish away and never be heard of more. Personally, I was glad to be a "Boojem," because behind that mysterious staircase was ample food to aid in the solution of all these intricacies. There was the clink of the ice in the golden glass, the thin and fragrant aroma of good imported cigars, and a wealth of stories. Several of the men were versed in English, and from one of them I heard the yarn, recounted in a previous chapter, of "The King of Clipperton Island."

Several hours drifted lightly by before we were uprooted by the hostess and asked to join the active contestants at supper. This, composed of sandwiches, salads and great foaming pitchers of ale, was followed by an entertainment in which the children of the host—three girls ranging in years from eight to thirteen—gave solo dances to the gentle accompaniment of the orchestra. Each of them, with all the self-assurance and repose of recognized talent, skipped

and tossed through lively interpretations, often adding to her remarkable grace by phrases of Spanish song. The anxious eyes of several nursemaids peered down from aloft; and beamed with pride when, amid hearty applause, their separate charges dipped a curtesy, smiled and fairly flew from the *sala*.

CHAPTER X

RANCHO LA JUNTA ENTERTAINS

WHAT Mazatlan lacks with respect to harbour, she gains in natural charm. It is as if her harbour-board, if such a board exists, were composed of artist dreamers who had travelled overseas, gazed with horror upon Liverpool, fled to the lakes of Switzerland and Italy, lingered about the bays of Naples, Nice and Monte Carlo, then returned home with the impression that God was engineer enough. It is as if, when forced to spend appropriations, they had done so with this in view—cutting drives through coloured rocks of the hill-sides, allowing quaint little dwellings with humpty-dumpty roofs of mossy tile to tint the water with kaleidoscopic patterns that blend with the blue of the sea and the sky and with the shaggy green surroundings, erecting structures of stone that rise sheer from a mirror of water like the old *palazzos* of Venice, protecting ancient fortresses, drab, but deep-souled as the etchings of Rembrandt, influencing, in fact, the entire city to see herself from the zone where the sea-gulls fly and the white-sailed ships stand in; for here, above all, reign the dream gods of Mazatlan.

Approach it by sea for the picture. The railway terminus is the back door intended for the delivery boy; but even then, as you drive townward, as you pass the little huts that Jack built, the fishing settlements, the palm groves and the Campo Santo, as you roll on over the hot powdery road where dusty burros

jog with cargoes, you will be very apt to marvel at the Mexico of it all. Mazatlan has not been "spoiled." You have only to remember when some polite and smiling peon offers to carry your bag, when a cab-driver hisses at you to climb aboard, or a boatman offers to paddle you out to the blue grotto of Creston Isle, that you are dealing most likely with a highway robber; and this, of course, you might suspect anywhere. Go to Mazatlan in winter—by sea if you can, by land if you must; you will not be disappointed.

I dreamed while there of a home of my own, as, with the exception of La Paz, I could have dreamed of no other part of Mexico. I even investigated the cost of living. One American whom I questioned was engaged in business there. He lived with his wife and child in a handsome *casa* overlooking the sea and the most beautiful boulevard in the city. From his balcony, fanned by the ocean breeze, he could watch the breakers booming up at night with gold-green light of phosphorescence, or perhaps the full moon hanging over the white Tortuga Rock and the Isles of Hermano. Interested as he was in a large shipping firm, he owned a small launch which enabled him in leisure time to take short cruises to the neighbouring islands, or inland through the lagoons and rivers. For the care of this boat he employed a boatman; for the care of his child, a nurse; and for the general upkeep of his household, a cook and helper. He admitted that he lived quite extravagantly. Rent, wages, laundry bills, grocery bills, butcher, electric-light and fuel bills—everything save only clothing but including liberal spending money for his wife and himself, amounted to two hundred and twenty pesos a month! One hundred and ten dollars!

"My boatman," said the man in question, "is the worst of my servant problems. I pay my cook seventeen pesos a month, and started by paying this man fifteen. He seemed capable, and besides he had a wife. Later, as he increased his worth, I gave him twenty. Immediately he got another wife, parking her, for the sake of domestic harmony, at an opposite corner of the city. Not so long ago he requested another rise. I asked him if he were having difficulties supporting his family on twenty pesos. No, said he, that was easy enough, but recently he had acquired a third wife. She was very extravagant. I pay him thirty pesos now. A man like that's worth it."

I know very little about the laws of Mexico; but understand that, inasmuch as the wealthy class is comprised largely of foreigners, and the labour class almost entirely of natives, the present aim of the Government naturally favours the poor. Church marriages are so costly, it seems, that for vast numbers of the lower class they are prohibitive. Therefore common-law marriages are rampant, polygamy in the most promiscuous sense of the word is by no means extraordinary; and, for the sake of contentment among the poor, these domestic issues, though outwardly frowned at, are conscientiously avoided by judicial authorities. A man may have as many wives as he can support, or as many as it takes to support him or themselves. Who cares if they don't? If they do, the courts may adjust the matter; but the happy peon is capable of doing it himself. He has that way about him.

At least this particular boatman showed himself to be a very able man. If he managed his three house-

holds, with their respective and prospective families, on fifteen dollars a month as well as he handled his boat, one could readily understand. We were on our way to Rancho La Junta as guests of the British Consul, his son, and of the general manager of the Mexican State Line who was taking us part way there in his launch under the care of his prodigious boatman. The latter dodged us in through the narrow channels of the flats, around treacherous submerged rocks and on up into the estero with all the silent equanimity of a ship's master. He knew his business, and his business was all his own.

We passed a coconut plantation on a large island of the inner harbour ; and a more picturesque place for a home would be difficult to find. Long-necked palms, held as if through vanity to gaze forever upon their naked trunks and feather-tufted heads, craned out over the calm water, while farther in, where the pale grass swooned for lack of sun, a thousand columns swayed almost imperceptibly from the soft breeze in the foliage above. On such an island, I told my host, I'd like to build a home. He smiled and said :

" A friend of mine leases that from the Government. He pays a hundred dollars a year. He, too, would like to build a home there, and probably will when times are better."

Thus you see opportunity after opportunity slipping by, and think, " If only I were not engaged by this or that, I'd come here and make a fortune, living all the while in Paradise." But then comes the thought of Mexico's unrest ; of the thousands of others who have dreamed as you have dreamed ; who have come here, spent their youth and lost what little they had, including their lives ; because Mexico, while she sits upon a gold

mine waiting for the gold to roll out and hop into her lap, is not unconscious of the fact that she is being undermined. She can hear them blasting and digging. She believes it right to make laws to prevent it, and to levy taxes to recover her natural heritage. She is as short-sighted as other nations that I know—nations existing within themselves on theories of sound co-operation, but shrinking from the very thought of it with others of their kind. *Mexico for Mexicans!* she cries, waving the flag of her glorious isolation, wrapping it around her head so that she can see no farther, and dreaming of the riches that should be hers by all the laws of God. And what nation can blame her? She wants what she has, and while starving for that which she has not, forgets that there is such a word as trade.

The little launch chugged on, leaving the Isle of Palms behind, passing a hundred derelicts which had once served Americans as yachts, later Mexicans as fishing boats, and now the worms as fodder. Nearly all such vessels of the Pacific Coast spend their last days in Mexican waters. Some of them end on the rocks, but most of them in the "bone-yard" of Mazatlan. One I recognized by the faded gilt rope carved upon her transom and the almost indistinguishable letters of her name, *Lurline*. Once she had received the attention of a princess, and cut her fame in the sea from San Francisco to the Mexican border. These were the days when the "fair-weather parlour-cars" were unknown on the high seas; the days when, if you talked with a yachtsman, ten to one you were talking with a sailor. To-day the ratio is inverted. The old art of sailing, with all its traditions, is drifting bit by bit into the bone-yards to rot with the *Lurline*; for she was dismantled,

dismasted; the waters of her bilge rose and fell with the tide.

She vanished from view as we swung eastward into the Estero del Urias and on between the mangroves for about twelve miles to the head of the Barron River, where we brought up before a tiny Indian settlement and put ashore. Sea-legs were not made for horses, but horses we found—these sent down from the ranch to carry us back. They did so with little coaxing. We went galloping through the hot dust, dodging the brambles of the roadside and grazing the branches of trees; but it seemed only a matter of minutes before we were shaking the hand of the British Consul and gazing about at a wealth of orchards, shade trees, the rustic low ranch house fairly sagging beneath the weight of tile, and a motley gathering of nearly a hundred peons.

To recreate the impression of Rancho La Junta, as it came tingling through us during that perfect day, I should have to employ some Aztec Homer, dark of visage, sensuous, but with a soul of fire and eyes blinded by the fierce passions of his muse. We should see him, white-clad save for a vermilion sash and ample red fold of serape. We should find him seated in the cool of a tiled veranda, his broad sombrero crushed up behind against a pillar of white adobe, one sandalled foot propped high upon the rail, the other beating time upon the yellow bricks; while, strummed out in docked pulsations through the balmy air, would sound the tinkle of a Spanish guitar and a ballad fairly dancing with the old red gods of Mexico. We might hear the strains of "La Paloma" with strange deviations of time suggestive of savagery; or the melody of "Golondrina" with each note nipped so soon in the

bud that we can only dream the fragrance and yearn for a mystic satisfaction that cannot be, lest the bard play on forever.

The music that we actually heard, however, did not come from a single instrument. It was the combined talent of two ranchos, but so well combined that I think now only of the one man who seemed to hold the spirit of them all. Like my imaginary Indian bard, the world to him was a place of vague moving shadows, but that which his waning sight could not express, thumdrummed and leapt from his great guitar like burning goblins from the dark of the hereafter. He crashed out his moods not alone to our hearing, but deeper than mere notes can cut; while we, amid a gathering of two score ranch hands clouded in the thin grey vapour of their cigarettes, sat speechless, listening.

Throughout the day it was this feeling of unreality that pervaded as the very sunlight. I can picture this same little band, standing upon a low wall of adobe, fiddling and strumming away while the fresh green of banana fronds swayed behind them, and hearty cries of "*Toro! Toro!*" and "*Bravo! Valiente caballero!*" fairly settled the dust with the weight of enthusiasm. There was a multiple thumping of hoofs. There was a crowd that pushed back from the opening of a stockade. There was a dizzy spinning of lariats; there were sombreros bent to the wind, the heavy snorting of horses' nostrils as the stampede, lead by a skedaddling bull, thundered into the arena.

It wasn't a real arena, of course. It wasn't a real bull-fight. Nothing was real but the enthusiasm of the spectators and the attitude of the bull. The latter had learned, I believe through past experiences, that

you can't have a bull-fight without a fighting bull. Besides, as he was the sire of the herd, his life was safe. Toleration—that was the secret. And they threw him with lariats, prodded him with sticks and waved red flags in his face. Phoof! What did he care? Let them bring in Bianca, the cow. She'd lead them a merry chase.

And they did. And she did. It was easy to see who wore the trousers in that family. Evidently Bianca was filled with modern ideas, and believed heartily in athletics for women. She entered into the spirit of the thing and carried on.

One may see performances such as this at any rodeo of our own "wild west"; although perhaps our cowboys would not stoop to cows during such an exhibition. Yet Bianca was different. At the sound of the fiddle, it was hey-diddle-diddle—she'd have jumped it, if there'd been a moon. She forced the *caballeros* to the best of their horsemanship; for, unlike the silly bull, her charges were not blind ones. It was her feminine indecision that lost her the game. Making for one particular adversary, she would be diverted by another, and so on until, with a noose tightened about her legs, down she would go. Finally, attempting to throw a rider from her back, she grew weary of the sport, made a sudden lunge for the stockade, broke through, sent the *vaquero* flying into the crowd and went charging down the road with half a dozen horses hot on her heels. All this time the little orchestra played on, striking now into the throes of "Carmen"!

Followed the Dance of the Machete—this executed by the ranch foreman, who, to the slow elephantine thump of the guitar, clashed the sharp blades in accord

with the rhythm of his step. Close to his throat, behind his head, under his left leg, under his right the dangerous weapons whetted their appetites for blood. Already they had tasted it—his, we were told; and, at every slashing lick and clumsy step I saw him that much closer to the hospital. His revolver butt and studded belt glistened in the late sun while the perspiration trickled and fell from his swarthy jaw. Less and less seemed the sureness of his footing, but faster and faster swung the great knives until, amid the hoarse *bravos* from a hundred throats, he fell back and lost himself in the crowd. He had cut nothing but a thin ice of formality; and now—the wives and daughters of the many peons having assembled—all hands joined the dance.

Over the hard-baked ground, they were dancing still when we said good-bye; and, in the moonlight, chugging home in the silvery stream by the mangroves, even the fish were dancing. In fact, they danced within a few inches of our lives; and they were not flying-fish, but twelve-pound bass. We knew, because we weighed one. At least a dozen of them, attracted by the light, attempted to come aboard. They struck the planking with sufficient force to shake the entire launch. One of them alighted in the cockpit, stunning itself with the impact. It was served to us for breakfast on the following morning as we crossed the gulf for La Paz.

CHAPTER XI

HOMEWARD BOUND

OF La Paz I had heard that, with a population of nearly six thousand, she was the most important town of the Mexican Peninsula; that, with the greatest tannery in all of the Republic, she had stepped into national prominence; and that, with a pearling industry rivalled by few on the globe, she had become world-famous so that she did not boast of her exports of silver ores, bullion, hides, pearl-shell and several other products which alone, before the recent commercial depression, averaged a yearly income of half a million dollars. I knew that, there in her setting of desert waste where cactus and mesquite had been known to survive a rainless spell of nearly seven years, she was something of an oasis or, more literally, a pearl tucked away in the sand. I had read from Herbert Corey that, several years ago, before the bottom had dropped out of the pearl market, buyers from all over the world thronged here, crowded the little hotel so that some of those wealthy merchants were obliged to sleep in the corridors, and that two hundred thousand dollars had been paid to an erstwhile poverty-stricken crew of an Indian dugout for a single glossy little pebble, and that the streets in those days of war wealth fairly ran with gold.

As we approached, I recalled the various types of towns, ranging from such wattle villages as Navarrete

and Palmita to the handsome metropolis of Guadalajara—towns including the primitive and historic San Blas, typical Colima and Tepic, squalid Manzanillo and the happy blend of them all manifested in Mazatlan. La Paz was incomparable. La Paz was a type of her own.

If various human expressions may be said to characterize various lands, this town, I mused, would be an enigmatic smile on the face of a desert. There was a certain cool smugness about her, an air of refinement and diligent repose of manner suggestive of some exclusive summer resort where, if a stranger should intrude, he might do well to combine with his letter of introduction some casual mention of his pedigree. She seemed to have been scrubbed white and polished with sand and squilgee the day before our arrival; and she lay now—the pale, slender strip of her, backed by a wedge of mesa land—beneath the shade trees, fanning herself with palms.

Under a glaze of blue sky, we brought up before her in a silvery stream of tide, and gazed shoreward where low buildings—some of adobe, some of wood, but all of them stark and white—clustered behind the pier and thinned gradually on either side, with interruption of broad streets and gardens, until there was nothing left but the desert hills and the long white beach. There was balance. There was an air of cheerful severity, something as personal and distinctive as royal pride in a bungalow. Expressly Mexican, she was not without knowledge of alien architecture nor free from prejudices against wattle and thatch or even the tumble-waved roofs of tile that might be so picturesque as to seem quaint. Indeed I believe that I was conscious even then of the fact that between

her and Mexicanism lay a gulf as deep and broad and real as the very Gulf of California.

Nor was I altogether mistaken. We spent nearly a week in La Paz, during which time we became both happily and sadly involved in social involutions evoked through class distinction, more strictly observed here, perhaps, than anywhere else in the nation. This would not seem compatible with my first impression, since there continues to exist throughout all of Mexico an aristocracy as readily defined as white from black; but La Paz is no town to be shuffled off lightly.

The Spanish navigators realized this three centuries ago when, landing here among the half-starved savages, they regarded their expedition a sorry failure until pearls were casually displayed in sufficient quantities by the natives to make every man wealthy for the rest of his life. La Paz, to-day, is a town of beautiful women who, like the pearls of ancient times, may not be at once discovered. We did not find them strolling in the plaza, nor visiting the various shops. Shops here haven't that appeal. But it was on an occasion of a picnic aboard the *Velero* for Pichilique Harbour that they—chaperoned to the very teeth—invaded us in one colourific bunch, like so many animated dahlias.

I recalled immediately the women of Mazatlan with all their dangerous customs, and decided that any modest advance on my part should be executed with the greatest of care to avoid further embarrassment. In fact, I should have dared no advance whatever had it not been for Allan, who, being busy himself on the bridge, had asked several of us to lay aft and do a little ice-breaking. I went, armed with an ice-pick, but on sight of them, concealed the weapon, drew a long breath and, more or less, percolated myself in their

midst, humming and hawing what few trite Mexican idioms I knew. I had a clammy feeling that something was wrong, knowing, at least, that it was impossible to do anything right in the presence of Mexican aristocracy. My only hope was that I might find some young lady with a few words of English at her disposal, so that the battle could resolve itself to a duel instead of a grand one-sided free-for-all. I found the girl immediately.

"Some boat, this," she observed; but it was as if she had sprung at my throat.

I was whirled about, *en garde*, "*Si-oui-yes!*" I parried, and followed up a fair lunge at her lingo, with: "No fooling. Quite a barge." I thought I had her now on the defensive, for she was backing slowly toward the rail; but:

"I wish you'd take me back to old L.A.," she thrust, scoring a touch where my slang was most touchy. "L.A." being Middle-west for Los Angeles—an abbreviation no less repelling to the older Californians than "Frisco" for the city of the north.

Yet the girl did not hail from the Central States, nor any state north of the border. She was a blue-blooded Mexican with red-blooded ideas; and the longer our contest lasted, the more I realized the fact.

"Do you like L.A.?" I asked, gallantly wounding myself deeper with her own foil.

"Oh, boy!"

And I surrendered.

This girl had bobbed hair—something one doesn't see every day in Mexico—and eyebrows that made me look twice before I could tell whether they had been drawn there with a pencil or simply "thinned." In all other respects she was naturally beautiful—

large black eyes, light olive complexion; and, when I add that she was probably no more than fifteen years old, don't make hasty judgment as to her figure. She was, as I have said, born a Mexican. And while we slung our slang, another one almost exactly like her came flapping by just as the town orchestra, forward on the trunk cabin, began to play.

"Why can't they throw a little pep into that music?" remarked the second, with an accent that seemed to smooth all the rougher edges from the remark; and I realized now that this ice-breaking process, so far progressing quite well, was about to involve a dance.

With the exception of the ship's company, there was not a man aboard. Most of the male friends and relatives of these young women had been forced, through commercial inactivity, out of the country; and the several remaining, having business that called heavily upon their time, had declined Allan's invitation. Consequently we were outnumbered by the girls. I essayed dances with several, the second time with the second-mentioned *señorita*; and whatever remarks the first had been capable of making, the second could score one higher.

"I wish the old U.S. would come down and grab this country," she said, apropos of the pepless orchestra. "At least they'd pump a little *jazz* into it. I catch fits at home for saying that—not very patriotic, I suppose. But then, I should fret *my* life away over that! Up in L.A., while I was at the convent, there was something stirring all the time: dances, theatre parties, and all that. Are you from L.A.?" No, I was from *Frisco*. "Oh, Frisco! Some of the girls from this town go there too for their education."

By now I had solved the enigma behind the smile of La Paz. All other Mexican cities that we had visited had not gone out of their way for foreign influence. Foreign influence, if it existed at all, had come to them. Not that there was no American capital at stake in La Paz. There was; but, since the only approach to the town was by sea, it was seldom visited by tourists or, if so visited, they did not tarry long. Fundamentally the place was Mexican, but its own native blood, after several injections of American education, was diverting sadly from type.

Nearly every young woman aboard—and I estimated at least a dozen—had been schooled in California; nearly every young woman aboard not only spoke English, but was well acquainted with American provincialisms. It would be unfair, however, if I did not add that only a few of them put these provincialisms to practice. The attendance of the older ones to the various institutions of learning antedated the period of flapperism, and these, no less demure and charming than their sisters of Mazatlan, were rather amused by the mock sophistication of the newer youth.

There is a myth in the United States of a chronic hatred in the hearts of all Mexicans for the American people. If it exists anywhere in Mexico, it certainly does not in La Paz. Here, the leading citizens of the town, most of them born in Mexico, were educated in American schools or universities, and there established friendships that a mere border-line has nothing to do with. This may not be the Mexico that one goes miles to know. The atmosphere is too much that which we breathe at home. But an American in La Paz is known. There are no fables about him. The people there have seen him in all walks of life. They do not

judge him by those of his nationality that might visit their town. They are as well acquainted with his better qualities as with his worse; and, depending entirely upon their own tendencies and sense of judgment, American influence, good or bad, leaves the mark.

Meeting, as I did, an old classmate whose prospects for the continued good fortune of his family rested now on the ability of himself and his brother to carry on, seemed to give me new insight into the future of his country. He, like nearly every other enterprising native, did not commit himself on the matter from any political angles; but, like his American friend who managed the tannery, he harboured great vision for the La Paz of to-morrow. The foundation, though rather concealed, was there; and he was doing his part in the building. I believe that it will be men like him—and one need not fear that there are no others—who will bring Mexico back to her own; and it may be that a little place like La Paz, with its busy six thousand, will lead the way.

La Paz was the last town of any consequence visited by us during our venture in Mexican waters; but we did not say good-bye to the country until putting out from Santa Margarita Bay on the west coast of the Peninsula, where we laid foot for the last time on Mexican soil. There was no one there to greet us with the characteristic national smile. There was nothing but a friendly sea-lion who followed our skiff from the breakers to the yacht and, through sparse but rakish whiskers suggestive of a Spanish Don, whiffed his *adiós*, dived down and faded among the rippling shadows.

To the westward, a hundred and fifty miles or more,

lay the Alijos Rocks; and a little less than twice that distance thence northward, lay the desert island of Guadalupe, our first point of call. Joe was busy with his wireless, "picking up" San Pedro; Allan, in the chartroom, was drawing a straight line from a point representing the islands off Pt. San Eugenio, directly to the breakwater of Los Angeles Harbour. It passed within a short day's run of Guadalupe. I pointed out the fact to the skipper, but he smiled and shook his head. The doctor's patients, he observed, were scheduled for appointments beginning the following week. We had to get back. I glanced toward the doctor. He had not heard a word of it. Leaning over the chart-table he was sailing with an imaginary ship of his own among the Revilla Gigedos. He was catching peacock fish, amphioxi, ammonites and tan-armed cephalopods in the bright pools of Clarion Island. He raised his head slowly at the sound of a deep rumbling. An anchor chain began climbing up into its hawse pipe. Captain T——, glancing at the clock and barometer, jotted his findings in the log. A moment later Allan was moving the control slowly forward. Water churned astern, and we put out for home.

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